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THE CAPTAIN'S

ENEMY

OR,

THE FATEFUL

RED DIAMONDS

A Romance of the Old East and  
the Wild West.

CHAPTER I.

THE SOLDIER ASSASSIN.

"You vill do t'e vork, mine fr'ent?"

"Yes, I will kill him, Jew, for I hate him, and will thus have revenge, and get paid for it, too; but I must have one thousand dollars blood-money."

"It vas mooch moneys for only kill a mans; but I vas pay you."

"Then I will do the work."

"You hates him, you say joost now?"

"Yes, I hate him, because he had me punished," and the speaker uttered the words in a low, savage tone.

"Vell, here vas five hundred dollars, and I gif you t'e palance v'en you vas kill him."

By COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM

CAPTAIN DELMONT TOOK UP THE RED DIAMONDS AND HELD THEM BEFORE THE LIGHT.

"Good! I'll do it to-morrow night, when I am off duty, and he will return from the settlement then, so I can ambush him at Dead Man's Pass."

"Vell, I vill have t'e monish ready, and be ready to go mineself mit t'e train that starts to-morrow night."

"What have you against Captain Dudley Delmont, Jew?"

"That vas no pizziness of yours, soldier-mans. I wants him dead, and pays you to kill him. Come to mine camp v'en t'e vork vas done," and the Jew turned away from the one with whom he had been plotting the death of a human being, and walked rapidly toward his own quarters.

The scene was a frontier fort in Nebraska, and the speakers were a Jew trader and a soldier, wearing a sergeant's stripes upon his arm.

The former had a cunning, evil face, almost hidden by bushy hair and whiskers, and walked with a shuffling gait, while hestopped, as though from carrying a pack.

A few weeks before he had come in a wagon train to the fort, and the goods that he brought were really of the best quality and sold for a low price, so that he had done a good business; but the trader seemed to have other motives in coming to the fort than selling his goods, for he soon picked out his man, the sergeant, as one upon whom he could rely to become an assassin if well paid for the red work.

The conversation held with Sergeant Bainbridge, and which opens this story, proves that he had not mistaken his man.

The next evening, just after nightfall, a horseman was riding slowly along through a wild canyon, and upon a trail that led from the settlement to the fort. His head was bowed, as though in deep thought, and his horse was left to follow the trail at his will.

Suddenly a flash burst forth from among a clump of rocks, and, as the horse sprung forward in alarm, the rider fell heavily to the ground.

An hour after the steed dashed up to the stockade wall of the fort, neighing wildly, and was recognized by the sentinel as belonging to Captain Dudley Delmont, one of the most popular young officers in the army.

A lantern showed that there was a red stain upon the saddle-horn, and the frightened actions of the horse also went to prove that a tragedy had occurred.

The alarm was sounded, and ten minutes after a search party went out to find what had happened.

They returned at dawn, just as a train was pulling out from the fort, eastward bound.

"Vas he dead?" asked the Jew, as the party bore a body by.

"Yes, shot through the head," a scout remarked.

"Goot-by, mine fri'nt; I must hurry on after the trains. Goot-by, and here vas your monish. You vas do your work vell," and the Jew grasped the hand of the soldier-assassin and rode on after the train.

"I have my revenge and one thousand dollars as balm to my conscience—ah! some one calls me—I am wanted."

"Great God! can I be suspected?" and great beads of sweat broke out upon the forehead of the assassin.

"You are ordered, Sergeant Bainbridge, to get a guard and stand watch over the body of poor Captain Delmont," announced a corporal coming up to where the sergeant stood near the stockade gate.

"All right, Corporal Felter," was the reply, followed by the muttered words:

"My God! that I, above all others, should have been selected for this duty! But I dare not disobey."

Ten minutes after he entered the quarters where lay the body, just as an officer turned toward him hastily, as though to bar his way.

But the eyes of the sergeant had fallen upon the body, and while a cry of anguish broke from his lips he fell heavily upon the floor, his senses stunned by some fearful shock.

## CHAPTER II.

### TOO LATE.

A HORSEMAN was riding slowly along a country highway, leading among the hills and valleys of Virginia.

It was near the sunset hour, and the deep shadows of approaching night were already stealing over the valley.

The scene was a beautiful one, for here and there vale and hillside were dotted with houses, almost baronial in their look of solid comfort, and around each were thousands of acres belonging to the "lords of the manor."

At the head of the valley, beautifully situated, stood a mansion of imposing size, and, with its towers and wings looking castle-like in its grandeur.

No other house was within a couple of miles of it, and its encircling acres were encompassed by thousands, which composed "the farm" of the estate.

But upon this grand old house rested an air of desolation and solitude, while the broad drive-

way, leading from the massive stone gateway in the valley, was weed-grown, showing that it had been long untrod.

Passing this arched entrance to the deserted estate, the horseman said aloud:

"Grand old Echolands is still without a master, I see. One of these days I may purchase it and dwell there, for its heir may not return within the time allowed by the will, and then it will be for sale."

"Come, good horse, we must hasten on, for darkness will catch us before we reach the Retreat, and what a surprise it will be to father and Beatrice, who little expect me!"

Having turned from the main valley road into one that branched off over the hill, the horseman had nearly reached the summit and was winding slowly along under a cliff, when, suddenly, from over his head, there burst forth the sound of singing.

He came to a halt instantly, while half a hundred voices, male and female, poured forth a melody, which, in that wild place and at that hour, sounded weird and strange, seeming like an angel chorus from the clouds, coming as it did from over his head.

Through the woods upon the ridge rolled the voices, the sound floating out over the valley, and the horseman sat like one entranced as the words fell upon his ears:

"Nearer my God to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee!"

Until the last words of the beautiful hymn died away the horseman sat motionless in his saddle.

Then he said:

"Of course from the little burying-ground on the ridge yonder. One of our neighbors has passed away. Who can it be, I wonder? I will go there, for perhaps my father and sister are in attendance."

So saying, he rode on and, turning from the road into a weed-grown path that led along the ridge, he came in sight of a strange scene.

It was a spot hallowed with the graves of the dwellers in the neighborhood who had gone to their last resting-place, and thither were gathered half a hundred people, standing around an open grave, while, in the deathlike stillness that pervaded the scene the voice of the clergyman reading the burial service alone was heard.

The horseman dismounted, hitched his horse and walked noiselessly toward the spot.

A few on the outskirts of the crowd saw him, started back and left a way open.

With uncovered head he advanced to suddenly behold a slender form, clad in deep black, clinging to the arm of a tall man and sobbing pitifully.

"My God! it is Beatrice, my sister! Can it be my father that is dead?"

He spoke the words half aloud, and they came through his shut teeth, and, in the moment of excitement, he seemed to forget the effect of his coming upon his sister and stepped forward, just as the clergyman uttered the last words of the service.

"Beatrice! Sister!" and he confronted the weeping girl.

There was a chorus of exclamations from all who now beheld him, and then one loud, piercing cry from the maiden, who reeled and fell into the open grave ere any strong arm could prevent.

A cry of horror came from every one at this, and one old woman gasped forth:

"Heaven help her! what an omen of coming evil!"

But, the horseman had already sprung forward and stepping down into the grave, raised his sister in his strong arms and bore her to a grassy knoll near by.

"Stand back, please, for she is in a deathlike swoon!" he said calmly, and the crowd fell back, all but a physician and two ladies who came to render aid.

It was a long time before the eyes of the young girl opened with returning consciousness, and then the horseman stepped out of her sight, not wishing to give her another shock.

"Doctor, have I been ill?" she asked faintly, recognizing the physician.

"You fainted, Miss Beatrice, but you are all right now."

"Ah! was it my brother who came before me, or his ghost?" she asked in a startled kind of way.

"It was your brother, Miss Beatrice, for he is not dead, as we all supposed."

"No, Beatrice, I am here in flesh and blood, and, had I known that I was supposed to be dead, never would I have startled you as I did."

"But, poor father! he has passed away," and the young man clasped his arm about his sister, as she bent her head upon his breast and sobbed like a child.

Slowly the crowd departed, and the sister and brother were left standing apart while a couple of men filled up the grave, by which stood the clergyman and a tall man with a stern, saddened face—the same to whose arm the maiden had been clinging when her brother approached.

"This is a remarkable circumstance, Mr. Moore, and a sad one," said the clergyman, ad-

ressing the tall gentleman, whose pale face showed that he had been deeply affected by what had occurred.

"It is, indeed, sir, and I wonder not that Miss Delmont was so overcome, as I was really startled, as though an apparition from the grave had appeared before me."

"And all of us were, as we had no reason to doubt the story of Captain Delmont's death, as reported."

"But I rejoice that he lives, and his sister does not have to mourn for father and brother both."

"Now I will say good-evening, for I suppose you will drive home with your friends?"

"Yes, Miss Delmont was to have gone to her aunt's, but with her brother here now she will doubtless return to The Retreat," and bowing to the clergyman, as the grave was now filled in, Aubrey Moore walked toward the spot where the brother and sister stood, talking in a low tone.

At his approach the maiden looked up, her pale face slightly flushed, and she said:

"Brother, let me present to you Mr. Aubrey Moore, whom you have heard of as father's secretary."

"I am glad to welcome you home, Captain Delmont, and back to life, as it were, for we all deemed you dead, and your coming unnerved us all," said Aubrey Moore in a voice that was strangely soft and winning.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Moore, for I have learned of your goodness to my father and sister since you have been a dweller at The Retreat. But come; night is upon us and we must drive home, alas! most desolate, now that our father is dead," and Captain Delmont drew his sister's hand in his and led the way to the family carriage, which stood waiting at the gate.

The negro footman rode the young soldier's horse, while Captain Delmont entered the carriage with his sister and Aubrey Moore, and the vehicle rolled swiftly homeward to The Retreat Plantation.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE RED DIAMONDS.

In the grand library, with its walls covered with timeworn books, sat three persons, the evening following the funeral of the old master of The Retreat.

Those three were Captain Dudley Delmont—a gallant officer in a cavalry regiment stationed on the far frontier—a handsome, noble-faced man of twenty-five, with a splendid form and courteous manners that had come down to him from several generations of courtly ancestors.

His face was bronzed by exposure and heavily bearded, while his hair was worn somewhat long, falling upon his collar in wavy masses.

He was dressed in a fatigue uniform, and wore it with the easy grace of one who had been reared a soldier.

Aubrey Moore sat at the desk of the dead master, and held in his hand some papers.

His face was a study, in that no one could read it, and yet it was a face once seen never forgotten, with its stern lips, sad eyes and perfect features.

He was dressed in deep black, and when he spoke it was in a subdued voice, strangely musical in tone.

The third person in the library was Beatrice Delmont, the daughter of the dead master of The Retreat, the sister of the young soldier; and a most beautiful girl she was, too.

With the exception of Echolands, the deserted estate at the head of the valley, The Retreat was the grandest home in that section of Virginia, and Commodore Delmont—for he had been a naval officer—had been known to possess great wealth.

As Beatrice was away at boarding-school, and his son was in the army, Commodore Delmont had secured the services of a secretary, to get his affairs in "ship-shape condition," as he expressed it, so that should he die suddenly, nothing would be left undone, and his heirs could enjoy what he had left them.

This secretary was Aubrey Moore, a young man who had been recommended to him by his agents in Norfolk as in every way worthy of the trust.

And so he had proven himself the year that he had been an inmate of The Retreat, for from the first he commanded the respect and admiration of the commodore.

Several months before the death of Commodore Delmont, his daughter had graduated in a Northern school and returned home, and she, too, had become deeply interested in the secretary, and rumor had it she would one day marry him.

One day a bitter blow fell upon the dwellers in The Retreat, for news came from an army comrade that Dudley Delmont had been thrown from his horse and killed.

The letter was dated at a frontier settlement, and written weeks before, so that all the commodore could do was to write to his correspondent to give him all the particulars that he could upon the subject of his son's untimely death.

Before an answer came Commodore Delmont sickened and died, and the appearance of the

supposed dead soldier at the grave of his father may well have caused a surprise and been a shock to his sister, who felt that she was all alone in the world, with Aubrey Moore the only friend to comfort her in her double affliction.

"Before I ask you of my father's death," said Dudley, as the three sat in the library that night, "I deem it my duty to explain how it was that I was supposed to be dead."

"I was in the habit of visiting a brother officer, who, with his company, was quartered in a valley settlement, some twenty miles from the post, as a protection against Indian raids. Mortimer Bainbridge was as near to me as a brother could have been, and, strange to say, we were strikingly alike, and often were taken for each other."

"I had gone on a visit to Captain Bainbridge, when, as I entered the settlement, my horse fell heavily, from stepping into a hole, and threw me against a rock."

"It was believed that I was dead, and I was carried to the quarters of my friend, who must have at once have written to father, telling him the particulars, as you say, Mr. Moore, the letter was signed Mortimer Bainbridge."

"Yes, such was the signature; here is the letter," and Dudley Delmont took the letter and said:

"Yes, it is poor Mort's writing. But, to go on with my story: Captain Bainbridge left word that my body should be brought to the fort, and, mounting my horse, started to report to the colonel, as he believed, my death."

"Alas! he never reached there, for some cowardly assassin shot him on the way, whether from some personal motive of revenge, or mistaking him for me, I know not."

"His body was carried to the fort, for my horse had returned there, and so he was believed to be me, until his brother, a sergeant in the regiment, and a wild fellow, was ordered to guard the body, and upon entering my quarters recognized in the dead man his own brother."

"The shock caused him to swoon, for he was deeply attached to his brother, who had done much to redeem him from his wild ways."

"In the mean time the surgeon at the settlement had not ceased working to bring me around, and, though I had been thought killed outright, and lay motionless and insensible for hours, I at last showed signs of life, and the next day was pronounced to be quite out of danger."

"It was a sad blow to me to hear of my poor friend's death, by the hand of an assassin, and, feeling a good deal shaken up by my fall, I determined to come home on leave for a few weeks. I was delayed in coming, and, not knowing that Bainbridge had written to father, I supposed nothing was known of my accident, and hence was not prepared for the shock my coming gave you, sweet sister."

"But now, tell me of our dear father's death, for a bitter blow, indeed, it is to me."

Beatrice was too full of grief to speak, and looked appealingly toward Aubrey Moore, who said:

"Perhaps I can tell you better, Captain Delmont, than can your sister, for I was with your father day and night, and he honored me by trusting in my hands the carrying out of his last wishes."

"I feel, Mr. Moore, that you are deserving of the trust," said Dudley, who saw in his father's secretary no ordinary personage.

"I thank you, sir; but let me tell you that after hearing of your supposed death, your father never seemed the same man, and in vain was it that we tried to draw him out of his grief."

"At last, as I feared, the end came, though sooner than we expected, and, believing you dead, your father left to my guardianship your sister, and the execution of his will, which, I regret to say, left all to Miss Beatrice, excepting a few bequests, one of which he generously made to me."

"I cannot wonder at it, Mr. Moore, as my father thought me dead, and Beatrice was therefore considered sole heiress."

"But, brother, the will must be broken, and half of our father's wealth is yours," said Beatrice, quickly.

"You are ever my noble sister, and as frankly as you offer, so I accept, knowing that I was considered dead by my father."

"But there is one thing, Captain Delmont, which I suppose you must claim, as, strange to say, your father left no word regarding them in his will, and your sister positively refuses to claim them. I refer to the jewels which are known as the Red Diamonds."

"Yes, I remember them but too well, and there seems a strange fatality about them, for they were taken from about the neck of a young girl, found dead in the cabin of a pirate craft which was captured by my father."

"She had taken her own life during the combat, and the necklace was stained with her blood. Father, therefore, called them the Red Diamonds, and took them as his share of the prize."

"Your father seemed to prize them, and one day showed them to me with the remark that they had proven fatal to more than one wearer."

"Yes, father gave them to his sister as a wed-

ding present, and upon going home from the little chapel where she was married, with the jewels about her neck, the horses ran away and she was killed, the bride of an hour, while others in the carriage were unhurt."

"Her husband brought the Red Diamonds back to my father, who left them hidden away for years, and then gave them to my mother, to wear one night to the opera."

"Alas! they proved fatal again, for though the theater burned down, and though my father brought my mother out, in his arms, she never recovered from the shock, never regained consciousness, and once more the Red Diamonds were sent into exile and thus were, I suppose, forgotten by my father."

"And you will take them, sir?"

"Yes, if Beatrice refuses."

"I would not touch them on any account, brother, and wish that you would not," urged the maiden.

"I have not a grain of superstition in my nature, and will take them—yes, I will give them to the woman I marry as a wedding-present. Where are they, Mr. Moore?"

The secretary arose, and taking a key from his pocket unlocked a massive iron door set in the wall.

From a drawer within he took out a large morocco-covered case, and unlocking it a superb necklace was revealed, of some fifty rare diamonds set in a miniature gold chain.

Captain Delmont took up the Red Diamonds and held them before the light, while Beatrice shuddered as she exclaimed:

"Brother, put them away, for, oh! I dread them so!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE LOST MINIATURE.

SWINGING lazily in a hammock, stretched upon the piazza of a lordly old mansion in Virginia, a young lady was reading several letters, which had been brought to her by the negro postman who, twice each week, rode to the landing on the Potomac to meet the mail steamer.

The house was a large, rambling brick mansion, built three-score years ago, and was situated in a glade, running back from the Potomac.

The situation was a beautiful one, and through a vista in the forest the river was in full view, a quarter of a mile distant, while an avenue sloped gently down to the banks.

River Glade—for such was the name of the estate—had been the home of the Yanceys for four generations, and at the opening of this story there dwelt there the owner and his daughter, who was his heiress, for a son, the only other child of Judge Yancy, had been lost at sea some years before.

In the rear of River Glade Mansion were the out-houses of the plantation and the negro quarters, while upon the hills and valleys, for a mile around were the fields and forest belonging to the estate.

Yesula Yancy was a belle in the county, her only rival in beauty and wealth being Beatrice Delmont of The Retreat, some ten miles distant from River Glade Plantation.

As she reclined there in the hammock, lazily swinging to and fro, the grace of her exquisite form and the beauty of her face showed that she held just claim to the title of a reigning belle.

She was attired in a white dress that was most becoming, and her masses of auburn hair were simply caught up with an amber comb.

Her eyes were large, black, and held an expression of sadness when the face was in repose, but lighted up brilliantly in conversation or excitement.

Now, as she read a letter she held in her hand, a look of anger rested upon her face, and she said sharply:

"How dare he do such a thing?"

A perusal of the letter aloud, for the second time, will give a motive for her words.

It was dated at New York, and was from an old schoolmate, who had married and was living on the Hudson River.

It was as follows:

"MY DEAR YESULA:—"

"Do you know I have found the lost miniature of yourself, or rather regained it?"

"When it was taken from my parlor some months ago, I was deeply distressed and naturally accused all of your old admirers of the theft; but they pleaded innocent, and I knew not upon just which one to fix the guilt, so could only hope some day a guilty conscience might make the one who took it fetch it back, as I wrote you."

"Ten days ago a package came to me by Express, which contained your miniature, and along with it a note from one Captain Dudley Delmont of the army, who is stationed upon the far frontier."

"In his letter Captain Delmont states that a friend of his, Captain Mortimer Bainbridge, had been shot down by an assassin, and upon his body was found your miniature with my name and address upon the back, and so he begged to return it to me."

"You remember poor Bainbridge, how desperately he was in love with you, and I never once suspected him of the theft."

"Poor fellow! He has met a sad fate indeed, and I forgive him, only wondering that your picture did not protect him from the bullet of the assassin."

"But there is more to tell, for last night a young cavalry officer, a friend of my husband, came to us, and he at once took up your picture and told us that he had seen an exact painting of it, most artistically executed, hanging up in the quarters of a brother officer in the fort—one Captain Dudley Delmont, a most daring and dashing officer."

"He said that the painting was exquisitely framed and had hanging over it a velvet curtain which shielded it from view and which could only be drawn aside by untying a silken cord, and he had seen it only by an accident."

"Now this means, to my thinking, that this handsome, dashing Captain Delmont, like poor Bainbridge, fell in love with your likeness, and, though sending the miniature back, first painted it, for he is a fine artist our friend says."

There was more to the letter, but not upon the subject of the lost miniature; but, we may add, it was the fact that Dudley Delmont had painted her picture and had it in his room, though veiled, that caused Yesula to utter the words:

"How dare he do such a thing?"

Then she mused, half aloud:

"How strange that I have never yet seen Dudley Delmont, though our families, it is true, have been foes for two generations, and there is a grave between us, and of my father's digging, for he killed the brother of the commodore in a duel, when the two were rivals for the hand of my mother."

"And, that Dudley Delmont should paint my portrait is something I cannot pardon or forget."

"Were father to know it he would surely call him to account, and then another grave would have to be dug."

"I hate Dudley Delmont for this, and but that I knew a duel would follow, I would have father demand my portrait of him. I must get it in some way; yet how?"

With this question unanswered, Yesula Yancy arose from the hammock, her face flushed with anger, and the story of the lost portrait having suggested the idea, she took her easel and crayons and walked down the glade toward the river to finish sketching a landscape which she had been engaged upon for some weeks.

When she returned to the mansion, near the sunset hour, she was met by her father—a stern-faced man of forty-five, who had given up his seat on the judicial bench to live a life of ease at his plantation.

"My child, I have just heard from a neighbor that Commodore Delmont's son, Dudley, was killed out upon the frontier."

"Indeed, sir?" and the face of Yesula flushed and then paled, for she remembered that her anger of a few hours before had been against a dead man.

"Yes, and I feel sorry for the commodore, for I have always liked him, though I killed his brother in that duel, you know, twenty odd years ago."

"Young Delmont was considered one of the brightest officers in the service, and I happen to know that when your brother Bernard was a cadet at West Point with him, young Delmont secretly helped him out of some scrape, strange to say, when he knew of the feud between our families."

"Indeed, father, I had not heard of this."

"Nor I, until one of your brother's old friends told me of Bernard's mad acts there, and how he had been saved from expulsion by some one, whom it was found out afterward to have been Dudley Delmont."

Yesula bit her lips in a vexed way.

A Virginia woman, she had entered into the feud of her father against the Delmonts with heart and hand, and she liked not that her brother had received a favor from one of the hated name.

"He is dead, and I must not hold ill-will; but my portrait—what will become of that? I would like to see it, and I will!" she said, with earnest determination in look and tone.

#### CHAPTER V.

##### IN DEADLY PERIL.

WEEKS passed away, after the news of Dudley Delmont's death reached the neighborhood, and Yesula Yancy was anxiously waiting for a letter from her married friend, Mrs. Courtney Jeffrey, of New York, to whom she had written, asking her to get for her the portrait painted by the young officer from her miniature.

Mrs. Jeffrey had written that she had placed the matter in the hands of her husband's friend, who was to return at once to the frontier, and Yesula anxiously awaited the result.

Then came the news of the death of Commodore Delmont, and Yesula in her heart felt deeply for poor Beatrice, whom she had often seen, and could not but admire.

"I am sorry for this feud between the families, for I would like to go to her in her sorrow," she said to herself upon hearing of the commodore's death.

Then the neighborhood was startled by the sudden coming of Captain Delmont, believed to be dead, and the scene which had occurred at the grave of his father.

With Dudley Delmont living, Yesula Yancy's hatred of his name revived, and she was more than anxious to get from his keeping the por-

trait which he had dared to paint of her, and she wrote her friend, Mrs. Jeffrey, upon the subject at once, while she almost felt tempted to tell her father about the affair.

Several days after his return to The Retreat, Dudley Delmont mounted his horse, and, taking his rifle, rode away for a hunt through the hills, anxious by action or excitement to break the sad current of his thoughts, for his father's sudden death had been a bitter blow to him.

Just as he was about to ride away, his sister said to him:

"Brother, when you return I wish to have a talk with you, for I have a favor to ask."

"Certainly, Beatrice, now if you will," he answered, seeing that the face of his sister wore a look of anxiety.

"No, to-night will do, for we will then be alone, as Mr. Moore will not return until tomorrow."

"Very well, sis, I'll come back early," was the reply, as Dudley rode away.

He took the road down the valley, and not caring to strike out into the hills, held on down to the steamboat landing on the Potomac, remembering that it was mail-day.

He received a number of letters, which had been forwarded from the fort, and not considering them of immediate importance, rode on his way.

Here and there he brought down some game as he went along, and at last halted in a shady retreat for a rest.

Leaving his horse to graze upon the grass about him, he walked to the edge of a cliff, overhanging a small vale, and threw himself down upon the pine straw to read his letters.

For some time he was thus engaged, and then glanced about him at the scenery.

The scene he overlooked was the glade at the head of which was situated the Yancey mansion, and the view was a grand one.

Suddenly he heard a voice calling:

"Missy Y'sula! Oh! Missy Y'sula!"

He started as an answer came almost beneath his feet, an answer in a voice full of music and yet clear as flute-notes:

"Here I am, Chips!"

"Yas, missy!" was the reply, and a negro lad of fifteen came from toward the mansion and advanced to where Yesula Yancey was seated, at the foot of the cliff.

She had a camp-stool and her easel, and was at work sketching the scene presented from her point of observation.

"Got some letters for you, Missy Y'sula," said the negro lad, handing two to her.

Captain Delmont, from his place on the cliff, saw her rise quickly and seize the letters, while she cried:

"Yes, one is from Clarice Jeffrey, and I hope I will know all now about the portrait."

She hastily broke the seal, while the negro lad returned toward the house, after a glance full of awe at the sketch that Yesula was making.

Then aloud she read, and the words reached the ears of the young soldier:

"The picture was taken down from where it hung, and he has evidently carried it with him, as it is nowhere to be found in his quarters."

Though not comprehending what the words meant, Dudley Delmont saw that they caused the face of the maiden to flush with anger, and heard her exclaim:

"He shall not keep it! he shall give it up!"

As she stood there, her form drawn up to its full height, her face flushed and eyes flashing, she made a beautiful picture indeed, and the young soldier gazed enraptured at her.

He felt guilty in his heart of eavesdropping, and thus holding her at an advantage, for he was not one to do a mean act.

But his vicinity to River Glade Mansion had not struck him until he saw the negro approaching and discovered the maiden at her sketching below him.

The mansion was not in sight from his position, and he had left the river-road to ride along the ridge back to the valley highway and thence home.

The soft pine straw had prevented his step from being heard by Yesula, and she had been so close in under the cliff that he had not seen her until his attention was called to her presence by the coming of Chips.

In justice to himself the young soldier felt that he could do but one thing, and that was to retreat unseen and ride on his way homeward; but the beauty of Yesula Yancey was to blame that he failed to carry out at once his good intention, and, on the contrary, stood gazing upon her in rapt admiration.

After the angry stamp of her foot, and her outspoken words, she had resumed her seat upon her little camp-stool and again began work upon her sketch.

And still Dudley Delmont lingered, watching her rapid work, but unable to see how artistic it was.

Was it Fate that held him to that spot, when he knew that he ought not to tarry?

It would seem so, for Fate often guides our footsteps and our will, against heart and reason.

At last, with a deep sigh, he was about to

turn away, when his gaze fell upon something which caused him to start and look with even deeper attention than before.

At the side of the maiden, and not two feet away, was the old stump of a tree, and upon it was circled, with head raised to strike, a huge rattlesnake.

Intent upon her work Yesula did not notice her deadly danger, and the movement of her hand with the paint brush, seemed to have angered the huge reptile to strike a death-blow at his victim.

The warning rattle reached the ears even of Dudley Delmont, on the cliff, yet Yesula was oblivious to it, so lost was she in the work before her, or in her thoughts about the letter which evidently had annoyed her greatly.

One instant of horror to the young soldier, and then he threw his rifle to his shoulder, aimed quickly and fired at the head of the rattlesnake, as it was erect within a few inches of the shoulder of the maiden.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SAVED BY A FOE.

WHEN Captain Dudley Delmont touched the trigger of his rifle, he felt that he had not a second to lose, for the venomous reptile had given his warning rattle when the crack of the rifle sent a bullet that almost severed the head from the body!

Captain Delmont was noted as a dead shot; but the shot he had just made was the most important one of his life.

It was also the most difficult of execution, for the tremor of a muscle might cause him to miss the reptile's head, or it might also send the bullet crashing into the neck of Yesula Yancey!

But the bullet went true, for, with a wild whipping motion, the huge snake fell from the stump at the very feet of the startled maiden.

Captain Delmont heard Yesula's wild shriek of alarm, saw her spring to her feet, totter a few steps from the writhing snake and then sink in a swoon upon the velvety grass.

The young soldier was about to run to her aid, when, suddenly, he beheld that which caused him to restrain his movement and to stand undecided.

What he beheld was some one approaching the spot. It was Judge Yancey, who had been walking leisurely down the glade, until the rifle-shot and shriek of his daughter alarmed him; then he sprang forward quickly to the aid of Yesula, whom he saw fall in the faint.

"I am not known; her father is with her, so she needs not my aid, and I will go," said Captain Delmont, and he walked rapidly back to the grove where he had left his horse, and, mounting, rode away along the ridge road, which ran in the rear of the Yancey mansion.

In the mean time Judge Yancey had reached the side of his daughter and found her in a deathlike swoon.

A glance showed him the situation, for there was her overturned easel and camp-stool, and the huge rattlesnake was still writhing in agony about, his nearly severed head yet showing signs of life and vicious rage.

Taking a silver cup which Yesula always carried with her, the judge ran to a spring a few rods away and returned with water, which he dashed into the white, upturned face.

Then he chafed her hands, and again getting more water, bathed her face and wrists.

In a few moments Yesula sighed and then opened her eyes.

"Oh, father! was it a dream or a reality?" she cried, as she beheld the anxious face of the judge bending over her.

"It was real, my child, but, thank God, you are not harmed. You killed the reptile just in time."

"I killed him?"

"So I said, my child, and it was a splendid shot, though you fainted after it."

"Father, I did not kill that rattlesnake."

"Did you not shoot him with your pistol?" asked the surprised judge.

"No, father, my pistol is here in my pocket."

"Then who, in Heaven's name, fired the shot?" the surprised planter exclaimed.

"I do not know, father, for I only remember that I was deep in my work. It seemed to me that I did hear a rattling sound, then a hissing noise; then came the shot and my dress is spattered with blood, as you see, while I gave a cry and sprang to my feet as I saw the hideous snake almost upon me. Oh! it was terrible, father, and Yesula shuddered at the appalling remembrance.

"It was indeed horrible, my poor child, and I do not wonder that you swooned; but who was it that saved you from a death so awful?" and the judge looked about him in a mystified manner.

"Father, the shot seemed to have come from the cliff, as nearly as I remember; but who can have fired it?"

"Yes, and then hidden from us! I will accompany you to the house and then return with some of the servants and make search, for I wish to solve this mystery—wish to discover the one who has saved your life and is too modest to make himself known."

"Yes, father, I would know, too," and, as she was still considerably shaken up by her fearful experience, Yesula took her father's arm and walked toward the mansion, and at once retired to her room, while Judge Yancey and half-a-dozen servants went to the spot where the maiden had so nearly met an untimely death.

The snake lay dead where he had fallen, and the judge realized that it was the largest ever seen in that neighborhood, for it counted thirteen rattles!

The sketch-book, easel and camp-stool were gathered up and sent to the mansion, while Judge Yancey took different positions to discover just where the shot came from.

At last he decided that Yesula was right, in saying that it had been fired from the cliff.

"He certainly took desperate chances, and as certainly is a dead shot," the judge declared.

"A swerve of the bullet and my child, not the snake, would have been hit. Now to find out who he was."

Going up the cliff path, he soon reached the spot where the young cavalry officer had stood when he fired.

Back a short distance he saw where a horse had been hitched, and trailing the tracks, for the ground was soft, he discovered that the horseman had come from the river drive, and had gone off by way of the ridge road.

Two negroes were at once sent off, one to the mansion to bring the saddle-horse of the judge, and one animal for himself, and the other down to the river drive to inquire at several farm-houses there what horseman had passed along the road.

In half an hour the judge was mounted, and, accompanied by one of the negroes, set off on the trail of the horseman along the river road.

He tracked him readily along the ridge, into the valley road, and there the numerous hoof and wheel marks caused him to lose the trail.

But he continued on, and at last met a negro coming toward him, driving a market wagon.

Recognizing the man as one from a neighboring plantation, the judge said:

"Well, Uncle Jacob, have you met any one on ahead the past few miles?"

"I seen Marsa Delmont, sah."

"On horseback?"

"Yas, sah."

"Where was he?"

"Jist going up to the gate of The Retreat Plantation, sah."

"Was he alone?"

"Only riding horseback, sah, and he had his rifle with him, as though he'd been shootin', sah."

"Ah!" and as Uncle Jacob drove on, the judge sat upon his horse, his face working with strange emotions that filled his heart.

He remained silent for some time, and then rode on slowly, until he came to the large gateway leading in to The Retreat Plantation, the mansion being half a mile away.

"Dan?"

"Yas, marsa."

"See if that track is made by the same horse we were following along the ridge road."

"Yas, sah."

Dan dismounted and closely examined the hoof-mark which the judge had pointed out.

"Yas, sah, made by the same hoss," replied Dan.

The judge gave a sigh of relief, and again seemed in a quandary, sitting in quiet meditation, though his clouded brow and set lips proved that his thoughts were by no means of a pleasant nature.

At last the sound of hoofs aroused him, and one of his negroes came in sight—the man whom he had sent to the valley to make inquiries.

"Well, Jerry?" he asked, eagerly, as the negro drew rein.

"Folks has seen Marsa Dudley Delmont, sah, pass along the river drive."

"Did they say anything about him, Jerry?"

"Dey say he hab his rifle wid him, sah, and had done been shootin' somewhar along de road."

"It is as I feared when I met old Jacob—Dudley Delmont was the one who saved my child's life. That is why he did not make himself known."

"My God! what a situation! my daughter saved from death by my foe. What can I do? What shall I do?"

"I will ask Yesula herself," and so the judge rode rapidly back to his home, lost in bitter reveries.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A MAN'S COWARDICE AND A WOMAN'S PLUCK.

"WELL, my child, I have discovered who it was that fired that splendid shot," the judge said, as he entered the library at River Glade and was met by Yesula.

"Oh, father! how glad I am! Let us go at once and thank him, and know why he was so modest as to hide himself," cried Yesula, who, excepting looking a little pale, was herself once more.

"My dear girl, it is one we cannot thank," said the judge.

"Why, father, I cannot understand," Yesula replied.

"The man who saved your life, Yesula, was hunting along the ridge, had hitched his horse back in the pines and was doubtless watching you at your work, though you did not observe him."

"He beheld your danger and fired, and seeing me coming, quietly slipped away, wishing to remain unknown in the matter."

"But for what reason, father?"

"He has a good reason; and more, I shall respect it and let it not be known that the one who saved your life has been discovered."

"But I shall not, sir, for I owe to him deepest gratitude, and he shall know all that I feel for his noble service."

"My child, you must do no such thing, for I tell you it will not do," urged the judge, who, strong in other things, was weak where he had to humble his pride to a foe.

"I insist upon knowing who it is, father," Yesula persisted, with decision.

"It was Captain Dudley Delmont!"

Yesula Yancey started to her feet.

"I owe Dudley Delmont my life, father? You are sure of this?"

The judge answered by relating what he had discovered.

"There can be no doubt, father?"

"None."

"He was most generous to try and hide his identity, so as to place us under no obligations to him."

"He certainly was."

"And he knows you as the one who killed his uncle?"

"Certainly, my child, and I have heard he bitterly hates me."

She was silent a moment; then she said:

"Prejudice, pride and all must be buried now, and you must go to The Retreat with me and thank Captain Delmont."

"Never, my child!" sternly said the judge.

"Yes, father, it must be so."

"I cannot humble myself before my foes, Yesula."

"You should do your duty, sir, when it is so plainly set before you."

"No, let it remain as it is, and we can, by our silence, imply that we do not know who it was who fired the shot."

"Ah, father, this is not like you; it is unworthy of you."

"If it becomes known through Delmont that he was the one who saved you, then I shall write him a note of appreciation of his act. If it remains unknown, so it can rest, though, as I have said, Yesula, I really admire young Delmont, and still I will not, as the builder of the grave between us, be the one to first stretch my hand across it."

Yesula saw that her father meant all that he said—saw that he was morally afraid to act, when his honorable heart urged him to do so; but, pondering over the matter when alone in her room, she mused:

"Father acts like a coward in this matter; but I will be brave and do my duty. I will go to The Retreat alone, and thank Captain Delmont."

"Perhaps, too, he will offer some explanation about that portrait which he keeps curtained in his quarters."

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### ACROSS THE THRESHOLD.

"A lady to see you, Marsa Dudley."

So said Luke, the negro factotum of The Retreat, coming out to where Captain Delmont was lazily swinging in a hammock under the trees reading.

"A lady to see me, Duke?" and the young man started to his feet. "Who is it, Duke?"

"Don't recommember to have seen her, sah."

The face of the young soldier flushed, and he walked slowly toward the mansion.

He wore a free-and-easy suit, but looked very handsome in it, and if ladies called upon him they must expect to find him in undress uniform.

Beatrice was in the garden, gathering flowers, and Dudley was half tempted to send her to the visitor; but he decided to boldly face the ordeal, for in his heart he had a dread of what was before him.

Entering the parlor, he beheld a beautiful woman advance to meet him, for she had not been seated.

She was in a riding habit, and one gauntlet glove drawn from her hand, while she held her skirt gracefully about her exquisite form.

Dark plumes waved in her soft felt riding-hat, and the young soldier fairly started as this vision of beauty flashed upon him.

Bowing low, he said:

"This is an honor I had not expected, Miss Yancey, to greet you at The Retreat; but you are welcome."

Her face flushed at his words, and she said quickly:

"Are you Captain Dudley Delmont, may I ask?"

"Yes, Miss Yancey."

"May I ask how you knew me as Yesula Yancey, when we have never met before?"

She sent the shot straight home for a purpose, and she saw his face crimson almost painfully—but he said, though his tone was somewhat embarrassed:

"As neighbors, though not friends, Miss Yancey, it were strange indeed did we not at least know each other by sight."

"And yet I never saw you before, sir."

"You may have forgotten doing so, where I could but remember."

"Then you have seen me before?"

"Well, yes, Miss Yancey," and the young soldier looked confused, and said, to hide it:

"And I am glad to see you again, Miss Yancey, and to bid you welcome across the threshold of The Retreat."

"Captain Delmont," and Yesula spoke with deep earnestness, "you may feel assured, sir, that a most powerful motive only could have brought me here, knowing as I do the feud that has existed so long between those of your name and mine."

"Whatever the motive, Miss Yancey, again I say that you are welcome," he said, in his courtly way.

She bit her lips an instant, her face flushing and paling by turns, and then, as the tears rose unbidden to her beautiful eyes, she extended her hand, while her voice quivered as she spoke:

"Captain Delmont, I could not do otherwise than come here, knowing, as I do, that I owe to you my life—yes, my escape from a death that would have been appalling."

"My father would not come, for he would not bury his pride to do so, and hence I am here, sir, to tell you that I appreciate all that you did, and honor the modesty of your nature which caused you to wish to conceal your brave act."

"Captain Delmont, I owe you my life, and I have come to tell you that I deeply appreciate the debt you have placed upon me and mine."

For a moment Dudley Delmont had thought of pretending ignorance of her meaning; but he felt that it would be unmanly in him, and he said frankly, as he grasped the outstretched hand:

"Miss Yancey, how you discovered the fact that I was the one who rendered you a service, I do not know, for I meant, under existing circumstances, to keep my part a secret; but I am free to admit that I am now glad you know it, though never would I have made known the secret, and I appreciate fully your nobleness in coming to thank me."

"Permit me to call my sister, that she may also bid you welcome to The Retreat, as your courage has broken down the barrier that has been between your name and mine."

"Not my courage, sir, but yours, for few men could have done what you did—ugh! I shudder to recall my danger, and now, having done my duty, I will say farewell, for, though glad to meet Miss Delmont, I should prefer to do so in my own home, where you also I will be glad to see, as will my father, should you honor us with a visit."

Yesula felt that she had done her duty in boldly calling at The Retreat, upon its young master, and deemed that should Captain Delmont wish to bury the hatchet between them, it was the place of his sister and himself to call at River Glade, where she knew her father would be glad to greet them, though he had not possessed the moral courage to do what she had done.

"My sister is here, Miss Yancey, and I shall make known to her just what has happened," and as Dudley spoke, Beatrice came into the parlor, a basketful of beautiful flowers in her hand, while in her sun-hat and morning dress of deep black, she looked very lovely.

She started at seeing her brother and a visitor, and at a second glance recognized Yesula, whom she had seen at the country church and different gatherings in the neighborhood, which both had attended.

She wondered greatly at her presence there at The Retreat, but her brother quickly stepped forward and said:

"Beatrice, I beg to present to you Miss Yancey, who has shown the courage to call and thank me for having saved her life yesterday, an act which I meant to keep a secret, but which in some way she has discovered."

"I am very glad to meet Miss Yancey, and more so to feel that she has been rescued from death by you, brother, though how I cannot guess, for you certainly kept from me all knowledge of the affair."

"Miss Yancey, I congratulate you upon your safety and my brother upon his having saved you."

The lips of Yesula quivered at this greeting, and she grasped the hand of Beatrice, while she said:

"I thank you, Miss Delmont, and I beg your brother to tell you how deep the obligation I am under—an obligation which I hope will drive the shadow from between us—a shadow which, I regret to say, my father caused to drift over the former friendship of those of our name."

"Miss Yancey, I know full well the particulars of that sad affair, for I have heard it from my father's lips; but he cast no word of censure

upon your father, but bewailed the bitter ending which a rivalry in love brought about."

"Now let me know how it was that Brother Dudley has been so fortunate in serving you."

Thus urged by Beatrice, Yesula told the story of her danger, the hearing of the rattle, and yet seeming to be under a spell that held her there. Then came the shot, the spattering of blood upon her dress, her one glance in which she saw her peril, her cry and swooning away.

It was well told, and Beatrice turned pale as she pictured the thrilling scene, while Yesula turned to Dudley and said:

"Now, Captain Delmont, I pray you tell your story, for I am deeply curious to know why you were near me at a moment so opportune."

Delmont's face flushed, but he told of his ride, and how he had halted on the ridge to rest and read his letters and had been attracted to her presence in the Glade below by Chips calling to her.

She knew that it had been some minutes between the leaving of Chips and the shot, yet she said nothing of this, but again held forth her hand and replied:

"I thank you, sir, and now must go, hoping that both Miss Delmont and yourself will feel that you are welcome at River Glade."

"I will test that, Miss Yancey, by escorting you home," said Dudley.

And he at once ordered his horse and the two rode away together, while Beatrice said, fervently:

"Thank Heaven that cloud has drifted away from between us, for I have dreaded that some day Judge Yancey and Dudley would meet in deadly combat."

"She is a noble girl, and I admire her for what she has done in crossing the threshold of our home."

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### FROM AN AMBUSH.

DELMONT was a superb horseman, and this Yesula Yancey noticed as soon as he mounted his spirited horse and placed himself by her side.

He also could not but observe that she rode with rare grace, and looked very beautiful in the saddle.

Together they galloped away, taking the ridge road homeward, for Yesula had asked the young officer to go that way and point out to her the very spot where he had stood when he fired the unerring shot at the huge rattlesnake.

From a reason that each understood themselves, yet cared not to make known, both felt embarrassed in that ride, and conversation seemed hard to keep up.

Dudley Delmont was going to the home of a man who had slain his uncle, and whose daughter he had saved from death.

It is true that Yesula had broken the ice; but she had frankly confessed that her father would not visit The Retreat, and how would he be received, in spite of his daughter's wish, was what troubled him?

Would the stern judge resent his coming, and in a manner that must keep up the feud between the two families, he wondered?

He hoped not, and that after meeting Yesula there would be no bar to their friendship, for in his heart he had given the beautiful girl a warm place.

He had seen her once, years before when he was a cadet at West Point, and she North at school, but she had not known who he was then.

He had fallen in love with the miniature which Captain Mortimer Bainbridge had in his possession, and believing no one would know it, had painted a portrait from it.

That portrait was his ideal, and he believed it was to be worshiped only in secret, as he feared nothing would ever bring friendship between a Yancey and a Delmont.

He had brought the portrait with him in his trunk, and kept it hidden away there, and a glad surprise it was when he beheld the original in danger and had been able to save her.

Little did he believe, as they rode along together, that the young girl knew all about that portrait he so jealously guarded and highly prized; but the thought was in his heart and he felt it keenly.

Then, too, was the fear that Judge Yancey, known to be stern and relentless, would hurl insult upon him when he beheld him with his daughter, for Yesula had confessed that she had come without her father's knowledge that she had done so.

But the die was cast and he would brave the result, for to know Yesula Yancey had been the hope of his life since, when as a cadet he had seen her, then scarcely more than in her teens.

On her part Yesula was deeply occupied with her thoughts, about what her father would say, whether he would fly into a rage, or greet Captain Delmont as the young soldier deserved.

Had she been able to first see him and win him over, then she would feel no dread; but Dudley Delmont was with her, and the result of the meeting between the two could only be waited for with hope that all would be well.

Then, too, in her heart was the memory of that portrait. She had met the daring artist, who had secretly stolen her likeness, through his skill, and for some reason of his own kept it. She had meant to demand it of him; but when she gazed into his dark, handsome face, so full of nobleness and fascination, she had not the heart to do so.

Still, she must know from him why he had painted it, and what he meant to do with it, so to lead up to the subject she said:

"Did you know Captain Mortimer Bainbridge well, Captain Delmont?"

"Intimately, for he was my best friend and a noble fellow. His death was a great shock to me, and especially so as the man who was his assassin meant the shot for me."

"Indeed! tell me all about it, please," she said, with great interest in voice and look.

He told her the story of his injury and Captain Bainbridge's death, and said nothing of the miniature.

She spoke sympathizingly of the death of poor Bainbridge, and told him that she had known him well, and then with an effort said:

"I think I must thank you, Captain Delmont, for returning to my intimate friend, Mrs. Courtney Jeffrey, a miniature of myself, which I had given her when we graduated."

She saw his face flush, and yet he replied, calmly:

"The name of Mrs. Jeffrey, and her address, were on the back of the miniature, and so I returned it, Miss Yancey."

"Did you know whose likeness it was?"

"Yes."

"May I ask how, not having seen me?"

"You are mistaken, for I saw you years ago, when, with your father, you were on a Hudson River steamboat. I recognized him, and heard you call him father, for I was a cadet, then, returning to West Point."

"But I have changed greatly since then, for I must have been only about thirteen."

"You have not changed beyond my recognition of you."

"And you knew the miniature?"

"Yes, even before Bainbridge told me who it was."

"May I ask if you know how he got it?"

"No, I am not aware, but supposed you gave it to him, for he said that it was the likeness of one to whom he was most deeply attached."

"I never gave my picture to any one, Captain Delmont, and I regret to say that Captain Bainbridge purloined it."

"Impossible! He could not be guilty of so mean an act, Miss Yancey."

She started and looked fixedly into his face.

In defending his friend he had forgotten that he had painted her portrait clandestinely, from that very miniature!

"Still, after his visit to Mrs. Jeffrey the miniature was missing, and only upon the receipt of your letter did my friend suspect who had taken it."

"Miss Yancey, I am sure that poor Bainbridge did not take that picture, for it would be nothing more than a theft, for its intrinsic value might cause one to steal it; but Bainbridge never did so."

"Still, it was taken, with gold case and all, and you found it upon his body after he was killed?"

"True, it was found upon his body, and once he had shown it to me; but he never took it by dishonorable means, I am sure."

"I should hate to believe so, for I always liked Captain Bainbridge; still, the fact remains against him."

"It is a mystery which I shall try and clear up, to change your opinion of my friend."

She felt that then was the moment for her to ask about the portrait he had painted from that miniature, and so clear up the mystery of why he had done so, and why he kept it; but, had her life depended upon it, she could not have asked him, and with an impatient toss of her head at her failure to do as she had intended, she urged her horse forward at a faster gallop.

Soon after they reached the cliff, and dismounting, the captain aided her to alight and pointed out the spot where he had stood when he fired the shot at the rattlesnake.

"It was a desperate chance, Miss Yancey, for, you see, as I had to fire from here, I was in terrible danger of killing you also. But I had to take the risk, and, thank God! my aim was true."

He spoke most earnestly, the scene seeming to recall vividly to his mind what had occurred there, and in silence she held forth her hand to him.

The young soldier pressed her hand gently, and as he released it a puff of white smoke suddenly burst from a thicket not far away, and he sunk at the feet of Yesula, while a red stain upon his forehead showed where the bullet of an assassin had cut its way.

## CHAPTER X.

### AN ACCUSATION.

WHEN Dudley Delmont sunk at the feet of Yesula Yancey, a red stain upon his forehead, showing where the bullet of the assassin had cut

its way, a cry broke from the lips of the maiden, and for an instant she stood like a statue.

Then she brought her will into action and with an effort gained self-control.

She saw the young soldier lying motionless at her feet, and believing him dead, she ran to her horse, leaped into the saddle and rode directly toward the spot where the shot had come from; but the assassin had gone, and yet, far down the hillside, she saw a form clad in gray gliding through the trees.

She could not pursue on horseback, and she also noticed that the fugitive was running rapidly and carried a rifle in his hand.

"He is dressed in gray! My God! it cannot mean that—"

She paused, and her pale face became livid.

Then she rode rapidly along the path leading to the Glade, and soon came upon a handkerchief lying in the way.

She dismounted quickly and picked it up, and a cry was repressed as she read a name in one corner, for the handkerchief lay in the path just where the fugitive had crossed.

Mounting her horse again Yesula rode rapidly on to the mansion and her cries soon alarmed the servants, who were quickly ordered to the cliff to bring the body of the young soldier to the mansion.

"Where is my father, Jerry?" she quickly asked.

"Gone out with his rifle, missy, squi'l-shoot-in," was the reply.

An impatient ejaculation broke from Yesula's lips, and again mounting, and bidding the servants follow her with a stretcher, she rode rapidly back to the cliff.

As she approached the spot with a feeling of awe, a cry broke from her lips, for she saw the man she had believed to be dead leaning against a tree and passing his hand slowly across his head.

At once she dashed forward and sprung to the ground.

"Oh, Captain Delmont! I am rejoiced to see you alive, for I deemed you dead," she cried.

"I was shot from an ambush, Miss Yancey, and I saw the crouching form of my would-be assassin just as he pulled trigger; but his bullet glanced on my hard head, and it turns out to be only a flesh-wound, though I am dizzy from the shock yet," and he smiled as he spoke.

"You saw the assassin?" asked Yesula, in almost a whisper.

"Yes, for an instant only."

"Would you know him?"

"No, for I only saw his crouching form, but he wore gray clothing, I discovered."

"Come, you must go with me at once to the house, and the servants will aid you, even carry you, as I had a stretcher brought, believing you dead."

"You are a brave girl, Miss Yesula, and acted promptly; but I will mount my horse and ride on with you, if you will kindly bind this handkerchief about my head."

She did so, and they mounted, just as the servants came up and were told that their services were not needed.

Arriving at the mansion they beheld Judge Yancey seated upon the piazza, his rifle standing by him, for he had just returned from a hunt, and been told by the old housekeeper what had occurred.

He arose as his daughter and Dudley Delmont rode up, and advanced to meet them, his face pale, his lips set.

But he well knew who it was that accompanied Yesula, and who had been the victim of an assassin's shot.

That Yesula had gone to The Retreat, when he refused to go, he felt assured, and now that she had done so it seemed to him that he should act.

As Dudley Delmont had returned with her, it must be that he held no enmity against him for the past, and so the judge, subduing his pride, advanced and said:

"Captain Delmont, I welcome you to River Glade Manor, sir, and I regret that you have met with misfortune in coming, though glad that it is no worse."

He spoke coldly, and did not offer his hand.

But Dudley Delmont frankly offered his, which was promptly grasped, while he said:

"I am glad to meet you, Judge Yancey, and it was to do so that I asked to escort Miss Yancey home."

"What I owe to you, Captain Delmont, I cannot now speak of; but let me assure you that I appreciate all that you have done for my loved child," and the voice of the judge trembled, while he added, as though to hide the emotion that he felt:

"But you are wounded, for Mercy told me just now that you had been fired upon and killed."

"Come, sir, let us see how serious your wound is."

The wound was really a slight one, for the bullet had glanced on the bone, and cut its way out; but the doctor was sent for at once, and, still feeling the shock, Dudley Delmont obeyed the injunction of the judge and laid down to rest for a while.

The physician was met by the servant, not

very far from River Glade, and came at once, so that the wound was quickly dressed and pronounced a close call from death.

The good doctor seemed surprised to see Dudley Delmont a guest at River Glade, but said nothing, and promising to call at The Retreat the following day, took his departure, muttering to himself:

"Strange indeed is it to see a Delmont and Yancey friends."

"How will it all end I wonder?"

"But who could have been the assassin?"

That was the question which disturbed those at River Glade, and the judge, while Dudley rested his horse and endeavored to find some trace of the would-be murderer, so he told his daughter.

But, after an hour he returned and told Captain Delmont and Yesula that he could find no clew.

As the young soldier had decided to return home, his horse had been brought around, and he was preparing to depart, when up dashed a young man on horseback.

He was a young planter—a dissipated, reckless youth who was running through with his inheritance and breaking his poor old mother's heart as rapidly as he could.

He had fallen in love with Yesula long before and offered himself, to be promptly refused, and it was a surprise to see him now coming to River Glade.

"Captain Delmont, we have not met since we were boys," he said, in an impressive manner that commanded the attention of all present; "but, sir, feeling that you are making a mistake in shaking hands with Judge Yancey across the grave of your uncle, I now inform you that the father of that girl is the man who fired at you from in ambush a few hours ago."

"Liar! you shall eat those words!" shouted the judge, his face livid, while Yesula gave a low groan and glanced at Captain Delmont.

He did not change a muscle, but asked quietly:

"Why do you make this accusation against Judge Yancey?"

"I was at the Cliff Spring, heard a shot, saw Judge Yancey running, rifle in hand, and learning from Doctor Fairfield awhile ago what had occurred, knew that I could place the assassin, and so came, to make my charge against that man, of an intention to murder you."

The judge stood like a statue, his face pallid as death, his eyes glaring upon his accuser, while Yesula, equally as white-faced, gazed appealingly at Dudley Delmont.

Calm, distinct then came the words of the young soldier:

"Brent Hastings, your charge against Judge Yancey is a false one, made, I believe, from motives of revenge on your part, and I would not believe the accusation even under oath from you."

An exclamation of joy came from Yesula's lips at this, while Judge Yancey said, earnestly:

"I thank you, Delmont, from my inmost soul for those words."

As for Hastings, he stood like one who had been struck a blow that dazed him; but, quickly regaining his composure, he said, with a sneer:

"The pretty face of Yesula Yancey has made you blind, Dudley Delmont, to the acts of her father; but my accusation is true, as you will some day learn to your cost, while your insulting words to me, rest assured, I shall not overlook."

"Nor shall I overlook your infamous charge against me, sir," cried the judge, as Brent Hastings turned on his heel and strode down the steps toward his waiting horse.

The young planter laughed lightly at the threat of the judge, while Dudley Delmont merely bowed in answer to the hint of a challenge.

When Brent Hastings had ridden off, Captain Delmont said pleasantly, as though wholly ignoring the charge:

"Now I must be off, for my sister is all alone, and she seems in expressibly sad and blue of late."

With a grasp of the hand from both the judge and Yesula, Dudley Delmont mounted his horse and rode away, his brain full of strange thoughts at all that had transpired in the past few months of his life.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE SISTER'S CONFESSION.

It was sunset when Dudley Delmont returned home, and he found his sister pacing up and down the broad piazza.

She greeted him pleasantly, but his keen eye detected that she had just forced a shadow from her face, and he seemed to feel that she was brooding over other than the death of their father.

"I must have a talk with her to-night," he muttered.

And then, as she noticed the handkerchief bound about his head, he quickly explained to her how he had been wounded and the charges made against Judge Yancey by Brent Hastings.

Supper was announced, and so Beatrice made

no comment, and soon after the brother and sister were seated in the library together, both intent and thoughtful.

"Well, sis, what do you think of Miss Yancey?" asked Dudley in a light tone.

"I think she is a noble girl, and she showed it in coming here as she did to thank you, when her father refused to do so," answered Beatrice, warmly.

"I agree with you, sis, she is a lovely woman; but you have said nothing as to my being shot at from an ambush."

"You do not believe that Judge Yancey did it, Dudley?"

"Assuredly not."

"I do!"

"Beatrice!" and the young soldier spoke almost sternly.

"Well, Dudley, he certainly killed Uncle Rupert, and has kept up a bitter enmity for all bearing our name ever since. He owed his daughter's life to you, and yet would not come at once and thank you, while she did so."

"He saw you with her, in my opinion, believed you were secretly friends, if not more, and in his deep anger fired at you."

"I cannot believe it."

"Yet Brent Hastings saw him."

"He says so, but I do not believe him."

"I cannot see what motive he had in making the charge."

"Revenge, for I learn that the judge forbade him to ever enter River Glade Mansion again."

Beatrice shook her head and Dudley saw that she firmly believed that Judge Yancey was his intended assassin, and to confirm him in this belief she added:

"I really believe, brother, that you know Judge Yancey to be guilty, and shield him only on account of his daughter."

The face of the young soldier flushed at this, while he said, quickly:

"We will not discuss this matter further, Beatrice, but talk of yourself, for I believe you have something to tell me?"

It was now her turn to flush up and her face became crimson; but instantly the blood left it and she became very pale; but she seemed to have made up her mind what to do, and said:

"Yes, I have much to tell you, brother—a confession to make."

"I am willing to hear all, Bea, but cannot believe you have any very great sin to confess."

"I am glad you do not think so, brother; but I feel that I must tell you all, and I will do so. The truth is, Dudley, I had no one to seek advice from, and I acted upon my own responsibility. Don't be angry with me, but let me feel that I have your sanction to what I have done."

"And what can it be, little sister, for you seem really distressed?" said Dudley in a low, kind tone.

"Brother, I am married!"

"Married?"

With the word Dudley Delmont was upon his feet, and his whole manner showed surprise and emotion.

"Be calm, Dudley, and listen to me, I beg of you."

He sat down again by her side, and said simply:

"Tell me all."

"To begin with, brother, from the time I met Aubrey Moore I have seemed to be a different being."

"He then is your husband?"

"Yes."

"And since my return he has kept this secret from me?"

"Do not blame him, Dudley, for I implored him to let me tell you all, and I have procrastinated in doing so."

"Mr. Moore said, when he left the other day, that I must at once tell you all, or he should do so upon his return."

"You love him then?"

"Yes, or I am under a spell, for he fascinates me," and she shuddered.

"He is a very fascinating man; and I think most highly of him; but I regret he has led you into a secret marriage."

"It was in this way, brother: He asked father for my hand, and consent was given, and then, as you were believed to be dead, and father was dying, Aubrey Moore urged me to consent to a secret marriage, and I did so. We were married by the clergyman of the Episcopal church at Comorn, and Mr. Moore said, that it would protect me if aught was said against me, while, after a few months, we could be again publicly united."

"I yielded, and this is my confession, and Aubrey has now gone to arrange for my sharing with you the fortune which father left."

"Now, Dudley, you know all, and it remains for you to say what shall be done."

"My dear sister, I wish for you every joy in life, and I believe that Moore will make you a good husband; but I wonder that he urged a secret marriage, when it would have been better to have had a public one and have it known."

"I shall return before very long to my command, and before I do, I wish the marriage made public, and you are to dwell here at The Retreat, which you know will come to me as my

share, and until Moore can find a home elsewhere, and I would advise him to purchase Echolands."

"Oh, brother, I would not go to that haunted place to live for worlds!" cried Beatrice.

Dudley laughed, while he said:

"You are as superstitious as the negroes, Bea; but for myself I like Echolands."

"I dread it; but, speaking of superstition, brother, there is one thing I wish to tell," and she seemed strangely nervous as she spoke.

"Well, sister?"

"I wish you to make me a bridal present."

"Certainly; what will you have?"

"I wish the Red Diamonds for a bridal gift from you, for I will put their ill-omened powers to the test!" replied Beatrice, in a low, earnest voice.

Again did Dudley spring to his feet in his utter amazement.

"Beatrice, only a short while ago you looked with horror upon that red diamond necklace, and now you ask it as a gift from me."

"I have changed my mind regarding it, brother."

"You remember its story?"

"Yes; I remember the stones have won the name of Red Diamonds from the fact that they have appeared to be fatal to all who wore them."

"The pirate's bride, from whom father took them, died with them on, and our aunt and our mother both met death with the Red Diamonds about their necks."

"And yet you wish to possess them?"

"Yes, brother, I am willing to test the proof of their fatality," was the low reply.

"Beatrice," said Dudley Delmont, after a long silence in which he seemed lost in deep thought, "if I had an atom of superstition in my nature I would not give you those diamonds; but I have not, and I look at the fatality that has attended the wearing of them, from the pirate's bride to our mother, as sheer accident. Such an accident could not occur again, and you accept them knowing full well their history, so I give them to you with real pleasure, for they are superb stones and worth a small fortune."

She did not thank him, but, after awhile, said:

"Brother, I would like to be married over again, with you to give me away, and in the little church across the river where father and mother were united."

"I am willing, Beatrice, and, in fact, would prefer it, so will speak to Moore about it upon his return, while the sooner the better—Ah! he is here now!"

And as Dudley uttered the words Aubrey Moore, the handsome, fascinating man who had been his father's secretary, entered the library attired in his riding-suit and top-boots, for he had just returned from a journey on horseback.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A HOSTILE EMBASSADOR.

A GLANCE seemed to tell the handsome secretary that his secret marriage with Beatrice Delmont was known to the brother; but the latter greeted him warmly and said:

"I congratulate you, Moore, upon having won so true a little woman for your wife, as is my sister; but there is much to talk to you about, regarding this marriage, which I only regret was a secret one, and Beatrice and myself have agreed upon a plan which I hope will chime in with your views."

"My dear captain, I appreciate your kindness in this matter, and confess that I erred in urging a secret marriage; but believing you dead, and with your father dying, I urged it to kill thereby all censure that might arise, should it become necessary for your sister to remain alone with me at The Retreat."

"Some months after your father's death, when time had softened her grief for your supposed untimely end, and for her father, I intended to make her publicly my wife; but fearing the tongue of scandal might fall upon her meanwhile, I had the secret marriage performed by an Episcopal clergyman, to clear from her name all stain, should it be necessary to use it."

"Such was my motive, Captain Delmont," and Aubrey Moore spoke with deep feeling.

"I appreciate your motive and thank you," replied Dudley.

"Now, let me tell you that the lawyers will be here within a week to arrange the papers for a division of the property left by your father, for I have been up to town to see them."

"Again I thank you, and it is my wish to have you, meanwhile, married publicly to my sister, so that the papers may have her signature as your wife, and my own, and I have promised Beatrice as a wedding gift the Red Diamonds."

"Ah! and you are not superstitious about them?"

"Not in the least."

"And you, Beatrice, about accepting them?" and the secretary turned to the maiden, who had been listening in silence to the conversation.

"As my brother makes me a wedding present of the Red Diamonds, I shall accept them, and more, I shall wear them when we are a second

time married, Aubrey. It will be a good test if they are ill-omened," was the firm but low reply of Beatrice.

Supper was then announced as ready for Aubrey Moore, and Beatrice accompanied him to look after his comfort, while Dudley paced to and fro in the large library in deep thought.

Suddenly the door opened and the negro butler announced a visitor, and a young man entered whom the soldier remembered as an attorney in the village some miles distant, and one who, the gossips said, was a man of questionable ways.

"It has been years since last we met, Captain Delmont, and we were mere boys then," said the visitor, as he advanced to meet the master of The Retreat.

Dudley had never liked his visitor, as a boy, and yet he was too courtly a man not to greet him politely, so he at once offered his hand and said:

"Yes, Mr. Rolland, it has been long since we met; but I find you little changed, for I knew you at a glance when I saw you in the village the other day. Be seated, please."

The lawyer sat down and then said:

"I regret that our meeting now is not to be a pleasant one, Captain Delmont, and you will understand why when I tell you that I come as the friend of Mr. Brent Hastings."

"Ah! he is prompt in resuming my words; but I remember that he said I should hear from him. And what is Mr. Hastings's will, Mr. Rolland?" and Dudley spoke with the utmost sangfroid of manner and tone.

"He considered that you grossly insulted him."

"Doubtless a gentleman would so think, for I did utter words which no man of honor should tamely wear; but does he expect me to retract them?"

"Yes, sir, or to apologize, otherwise he demands a hostile meeting."

"I shall not retract, Mr. Rolland, for I believe Mr. Brent Hastings to have deliberately made an accusation against an honorable man out of motives of revenge."

"Then you must fight him."

"I regret this, too, for I came home half an invalid, and deep grief is in my heart for my father's death, while, as you see, I am now wounded, though slightly."

"Then, too, I should prefer to meet a man whose honor is not as sullied as is that of Brent Hastings; but I suppose I can only agree to his demand?"

"It is inevitable, Captain Delmont."

"I am sorry, sir; but if it must be, I refer you to Mr. Aubrey Moore, whom I now will send to you," and Dudley left the library, while Reuben Rolland, attorney at law, sat gazing about him at the luxurious surroundings and breaking the commandment in regard to "coveting his neighbor's goods."

In a few moments Aubrey Moore entered and greeted the visitor in his courtly manner, and at once entered into the business on hand, for Dudley had already told him what was the reason of the lawyer's call.

"Mr. Delmont wishes the meeting at sunrise in the morning," said Aubrey Moore.

"That is impossible, as Mr. Hastings has a meeting with Judge Yancey at that hour; but we will make it sunset to-morrow, in case no fatal effect follows the other affair."

"I will see what Captain Delmont says as to this," and, ringing a bell, Aubrey Moore sent a servant to summon the young soldier.

Dudley soon entered and upon learning of the meeting with Judge Yancey asked:

"Did Judge Yancey challenge Mr. Hastings, may I inquire, Mr. Rolland?"

"No. Mr. Hastings sent me to do so, Captain Delmont, when I met Judge Yancey's second, Colonel Yulee coming to challenge Mr. Hastings, and we agreed upon sunrise to-morrow as the hour."

"Then I shall demand a meeting at dawn, upon the spot selected as the place where the judge and Hastings are to meet."

"But, captain, I—"

"It is my ultimatum, Mr. Rolland."

"Still, Captain Delmont, the first challenged has the priority of meeting," urged Aubrey Moore.

"If Mr. Hastings desires a meeting with me, it shall be upon those terms—dawn in the morning, and at the spot chosen for the duel between Judge Yancey and himself," and with a bow Dudley Delmont left the room, and after a few moments Lawyer Rolland departed, having agreed to the terms of the soldier, for both he and Aubrey Moore saw that he was determined to carry his point, and meet Brent Hastings before the latter met Judge Yancey.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE MEETING.

It was an hour before dawn of the following morning, when Captain Delmont and Aubrey Moore rode away from The Retreat on their way to the rendezvous where the duel was to be fought.

Not a word had been breathed to Beatrice upon the subject, for her brother was anxious to give her no unnecessary pain, and she was

fast asleep when the two noiselessly left the house.

King, a faithful negro servant, who had been born on The Retreat Plantation, accompanied his master and the secretary, carrying with him an ominous-looking bundle in which were the weapons to be used.

A ride of several miles brought them to the scene, a pretty spot overlooking the broad Potomac and a mile distant from any habitation.

It was said that the same spot had been the scene of a score of hostile meetings, some as far back as Revolutionary days, and a small inclosure, in which were several unmarked graves, gave truth to the assertion.

The dawn was just beginning to light up the Eastern horizon, when the two gentlemen and King dismounted and hitched their horses to the graveyard fence.

"We are ahead of them, captain," said Moore, as he saw that they were alone at the rendezvous.

"Yes, and it is always best to be first on the field; but they will soon be here, for Hastings, it is said, is really fond of fighting duels, and has killed several men in affairs of the kind he now has on hand," replied Captain Delmont.

"I have heard it said that he was a dead shot and expert swordsman."

"Yes, I believe so."

"And you?"

"I am skilled in the use of both weapons, fortunately, when my life is dependent upon their able use," was the cool reply.

"We are to use blades first, as you asked it."

"Certainly, for it is better so, as you can disarm a man, if his superior, and giving him his life will frequently end an affair without bloodshed."

"And if not, pistols?"

"Yes; but here they come," and as Dudley Delmont spoke, dimly seen through the gray dawn a party of horsemen were seen approaching.

As they drew nearer it was seen that there were four, for a physician and negro servant were with Brent Hastings and his second.

They saluted as they rode up, and dismounting, Doctor Fairfield approached the young soldier and said:

"This is a sad affair, Dudley, and you are in no condition to meet this man, after your injury out West and wound of yesterday. I was coming here to meet Judge Yancey, who wrote me that he had an affair with Hastings, and meeting them came on as you see, with them, for they told me you had a duel with Brent before his meeting with the judge," and the physician seemed to be really pained at the affair.

"Yes, doctor, my duel with Hastings is for about the same reason as his with the judge; but I was anxious to anticipate their meeting, hoping that I could prevent it."

"Hastings is a bad hand with sword or pistol, Dudley," said the doctor, who had known Delmont from his infancy.

"So I have heard, sir."

"But you ought to be, also, and I believe I have heard that you were the crack man of your class at West Point."

Dudley smiled, and his look of unconcern gave hope to the doctor that there would be no fatal termination to the duel if he could prevent it.

It was now daylight, and the two seconds stood apart discussing the arrangements, while Brent Hastings, with a cigar between his teeth and a wicked look in his eyes, was gazing out over the river at the brightening eastern horizon.

"All ready, Captain Delmont," said Aubrey Moore, approaching the young soldier, who nodded and walked toward his position, while the doctor got out his surgical instruments, ready for use if needed.

Brent Hastings threw aside his coat with the air of a man who had work to do and meant to do it well. He tried the temper of his blade and then stepped to his position.

Captain Delmont took his sword with the appearance of one who knew its worth, and silently stepped in front of his enemy, to whom he bowed with cold politeness.

A moment more and Aubrey Moore gave the word and the swords crossed.

How it happened no one, unless it was Captain Delmont, seemed to understand; but, almost instantly, the blade of Brent Hastings was sent flying from his hand, and then came the words from the soldier's lips:

"Mr. Hastings, I will be glad to offer you your life, sir, but upon certain conditions."

Brent Hastings was livid with rage. He prided himself upon his swordsmanship and had kept well up in practice. Two of the graves in the little inclosure a few yards away he had caused to be made, and he was proud of his name as a deadly duelist!

Suddenly he had met his master, and that master sternly offered him his life, but upon conditions.

Brent Hastings saw that he had been caught in his own trap, so to speak, for he had urged his second to demand that the meeting should be pressed to a fatal termination, and if either party was disarmed, the other had a right to run him through the heart at will.

Now he was the one who had been disarmed, and, by the terms, his own cruel terms, he was at the mercy of his soldier adversary.

He tried to appear calm, but his face flushed with mortification, and a moment after paled with anger and dread.

"Name your conditions, sir," he said, with a voice that quivered.

"That you refuse to fight with Judge Yancey."

All were surprised at the conditions, and no one more so than was Brent Hastings.

But he said quickly:

"I refuse to accede to your terms, sir."

"You know that I have the power to prevent a meeting?"

"How so?"

"By your own terms, for I have the right to run you through the heart."

There was that in the voice and look of Dudley Delmont which caused his adversary to flinch.

His face became livid, and which the glow in the eastern skies could not light up; but he would not yield and thus fall from the pinnacle he held among men as a man without fear, and without mercy. So he said:

"I refuse to accept your conditions, sir."

"And I, sir, refuse to become a murderer by carrying out your own terms of this duel; but I demand another meeting, and this time with revolvers."

A glad light flashed into the eyes of Brent Hastings at this, for fine swordsman though he was, he knew that his aim was deadly with a pistol and his nerve never failed him.

"I accept, sir, and let our seconds arrange," he said, haughtily, turning upon his heel and lighting a fresh cigar.

Aubrey Moore came then to Dudley's side and said:

"You know your rights, Captain Delmont?"

"Yes, but I am no murderer, Moore."

"And you will give him another meeting?"

"Yes, with pistols, for I am determined he shall not kill Judge Yancey, as he surely will do if they meet."

"You are right, and he so intends," the doctor said, for he overheard the remark. "Then you will meet him with pistols?"

"Yes, and please hasten the arrangements, Mr. Moore, for in a few minutes the sun will be up, and, should Judge Yancey arrive he can demand his meeting, and will, if he thinks I seek to forestall him."

Aubrey Moore turned away and approached Lawyer Rolland, the two talking earnestly together for a few minutes.

The eyes of the secretary frequently turned in the direction from whence Judge Yancey was expected to come, and he seemed as though, for some reason, he would like to have him arrive before a second meeting between Hastings and Captain Dudley, thinking, doubtless, that the young soldier might not fare so well with pistols before his formidable foe.

But a request from Captain Delmont to hasten matters prevented further delay, and the two men were soon again placed in position.

This time their hands held dueling-pistols, long-barreled, handsome weapons, in spite of their deadly look.

Brent Hastings wore a confident smile, one calculated to unnerve a foe who was easily upset, and yet Dudley Delmont seemed not to observe it.

When his adversary looked confident, the young soldier appeared only calm and stern, while upon his lips rested an expression that was unreadable to those who gazed upon him.

Aubrey Moore had won the word, and his mellow voice was not in the slightest degree ruffled by the situation, for he appeared like one who had been in just such scenes before.

Then came the words:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"I am!" boldly responded Brent Hastings, while Dudley Delmont bowed in silence.

"Fire!"

The shots were to be between the words *one* and *three*, and, quick as the lightning's flash the weapon of Dudley Delmont rose to a level and the finger touched the trigger, ere Brent Hastings, rapid as were his movements, could get his weapon to an aim.

Then followed a shot just as Yesula Yancey dashed upon the scene and drew her horse back upon his haunches directly between the two duelists.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### A SOLDIER'S MERCY.

"I did not want your life upon my conscience, Brent Hastings, but I have ended your career as a duelist."

The words were uttered calmly, and they proved that Captain Delmont had held the life of his adversary in his hands.

His shot had shattered the hand of Brent Hastings completely, the arm dropping uselessly to his side, his weapon falling to the ground.

It was just at that moment that Yesula Yancey dashed out into the path leading from the woods and drew rein almost between the two men.

She had heard the words of Delmont and real-

ized that he was not hurt and that he had spared the life of his foe.

Nay, she now saw that, where she had expected to find her father confronted by Brent Hastings, she found the young soldier.

A faithful servant had told her that her father was to fight a duel, awaking her from sleep in the early dawn and making known the fact that the spot was to be the little graveyard overlooking the Potomac, for the old negress had overheard her master tell his valet.

Rising in great haste, Yesula had mounted her horse and ridden away by a near cut through the plantation for the scene of the duel, which she knew well.

Her eyes filled with tears, and her rapid riding flushed her, so that she appeared upon the scene only able to perceive two forms facing each other and to hear the shot as she was almost upon them.

She was determined to prevent the duel, for she felt sure that Brent Hastings meant to kill her father, and that it would be but a case of murder.

To her amazement the voice of Captain Delmont fell upon her ears, and she now beheld not her father, but the young cavalry officer.

At that moment Judge Yancey rode up followed by his negro valet. His face was pale and excited, for he had just seen the shot fired and the coming upon the scene of Yesula, whom he had left at home little over half an hour before.

With a bow to Yesula, Captain Delmont turned to Doctor Fairfield and said:

"There is work for you, doctor, and if I mistake not, a case of amputation."

Then Yesula said, as the doctor hastened to the side of the wounded man, who was now supported by his second and Aubrey Moore:

"Captain Delmont, I came here to prevent a duel between my father and Mr. Hastings, who I knew would kill him, and blinded by my rapid riding, I saw not that you were present until you spoke. Pray forgive me, sir."

"There is nothing to forgive, Miss Yancey, I assure you; but you need feel no anxiety now regarding your father, as Mr. Hastings is wounded."

"And you spared his life?"

"Why should I kill him?" was the calm query.

Just then Judge Yancey rode up, and dismounting he quickly advanced toward his daughter and Captain Delmont, while he asked: "Delmont, pray tell me what this means?"

"It means, Judge Yancey, that Mr. Hastings felt insulted yesterday, and challenged us both, and I have just had my meeting with him, and it will prevent another duel being fought just now."

"You anticipated me, I fear; but is Hastings seriously hurt?"

"I aimed to shatter his hand, sir, and he may lose it."

The judge gazed at the speaker with admiration at his coolness, but turned to his daughter and said:

"How is it, Yesula, that I find you here at such a scene?"

Yesula had not spoken since the coming of her father, but now said:

"I learned that you were to meet Mr. Hastings at this spot, and knew that he would murder you, so came to prevent the duel, and discovered Captain Delmont, and not you, father, facing your enemy."

"I will go now, and will you not accompany me?"

"Yes, my child; but I feel pained that you should have come here, for better that I should lose my life than live through the entreaties of my daughter to a foe. Will you return and breakfast with us, Captain Delmont, for I suppose there can be no meeting now with Hastings?"

"No, sir, but let me speak with his second," and Delmont walked over to the little group about the wounded man, and called Lawyer Rolland aside.

"Judge Yancey is here, sir, to meet his engagement with your principal."

"Doctor Fairfield is the second of the judge, and you are aware that my principal cannot now fight, sir."

"So I intended, but I wished to instruct the judge that he might return home, for his daughter is with him."

"And strange it is too, that she should come here, for it looks—"

"Silence! the less you comment, sir, upon the actions of Miss Yancey the better it will be for you."

The stern voice of Dudley Delmont caused both Doctor Fairfield and Aubrey Moore to look around, and Reuben Rolland colored at the words and said hotly:

"I am not one to be threatened, Captain Delmont."

"Then cease to criticise, sir," was the cool response, and Dudley Delmont called Aubrey Moore to his side.

"Pray ask Doctor Fairfield if Judge Yancey is not at liberty to leave the field, as a meeting with Hastings is out of the question."

"Certainly it is, Delmont," called out Doctor

Fairfield, who was dressing the shattered hand of Brent Hastings, who was seated upon the ground, his back against a tree.

A moment after the doctor approached and said:

"He is done for, Delmont, for I shall have to amputate his arm when I get him home. Tell Yancey to go and that I will be over to dine with him to-day; but what did Yesula come here for?"

"To prevent the duel between her father and Hastings. She acted upon impulse, and if any man comments unfavorably upon it, as a plot between her father and herself, he answers to me," and Dudley Delmont returned to the judge and his daughter, who now rode away.

Sending his servant, King, to the plantation, to get a carriage to drive Brent Hastings to his home, Dudley Delmont, accompanied by Aubrey Moore, mounted their horses and rode toward The Retreat, the latter remarking:

"You are the coolest hand I ever saw, Captain Delmont, with both pistol and sword, and you held Hastings's life at your mercy."

"In service, as I am, my life depends upon my skill and coolness, Mr. Moore, while I certainly did not wish to kill where I could show mercy; but I was determined that Hastings should not kill Judge Yancey, as he intended to do, for he was revengeful."

"He will lose his arm."

"It will be a lesson to him, and also prevent his dueling in the future," was the reply, and the two rode on in silence, for the secretary saw that Dudley Delmont was not in a talkative mood, and he too was busy with his thoughts.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### THE DOCTOR'S STORY.

As they rode homeward together Judge Yancey's face wore a worried look, while Yesula seemed to be indulging in pleasant thoughts.

For some time neither spoke; but at last the judge said:

"My child, how did you know of this intended meeting between Hastings and myself?"

"That I cannot tell you, father, for it would be a betrayal of confidence; but I determined to prevent it if in my power, as I knew that Brent Hastings would kill you."

"He is a desperate man and a dead shot, and I confess I was anxious; but the duel was not to be avoided, and so I had to meet him; yet I fear your coming there will be misunderstood."

"How can it be, sir?"

"Folks may think that I got you to come, fearing to meet Hastings."

"Oh, father! they cannot think so mean of you, for has not your courage been put to the test?"

"Yes; but still men will say cruel things at times."

"I am sorry that I went, now that it has ended as it has; but then, father, I believe he would have killed you had not Captain Delmont wounded him."

"I feared it myself; but what a superb fellow that Delmont is."

"He seems to be a noble man, sir, for he could have killed Brent Hastings had he wished."

"He certainly has winged him badly, and if the shot does not cause him to lose his arm, he will be most fortunate."

And so they talked as they rode on together until they reached River Glade Mansion.

After breakfast Yesula took her easel and paints and went off on a sketching tour, for she was restless and wished to be alone with her thoughts; but her father insisted that she should take Chips along to watch for snakes, and that sable-skinned youngster quickly hunted up a cool spot for himself when he saw his young mistress sit down to work and was soon fast asleep.

And serenely he slept until Yesula, looking at her watch, saw that it was time to return home and dress for dinner.

"You are a lazy sentinel, Chips," she said, with a smile, as she awoke him from a sound sleep.

"I wasn't 'sleep, Missy 'Sula; I were jist 'tendin' so's I c'd see ther snakes and let 'em think I were 'sleep," was the ready lie that Chip told; but then how few of us who doze off are willing to admit, when caught, that we have been in the Land of Nod.

Arriving at the mansion Yesula found Doctor Fairfield just riding up, and soon after she joined him and her father at dinner.

After the dinner had been removed and the servants dismissed, the conversation turning upon the duel of the morning, Judge Yancey asked:

"Well, doctor, how is your patient?"

"Minus an arm," was the blunt response of the doctor.

"It was as bad as that?" asked Yesula, anxiously.

"Yes, I had to amputate it above the wrist, for the bullet shattered the entire hand, as Delmont meant that it should."

"You think he fired with that in view?"

"I know it, Yancey, for I saw his first duel."

"His first duel?"

"Yes, with Hastings."

"When was that?" asked the surprised judge.

"Before you arrived."

"And neither were hurt?"

"It was with swords, and quick as a flash Delmont disarmed him."

"Pray tell us all you know of the affair, doctor, and why the two met as they did, for I know that Yesula is also deeply interested as I am."

"Indeed I am, doctor," said Yesula.

"Well, I went to the scene, Yancey, as I had promised you I would, to second you, and met on the way Hastings, Rolland and their servant."

"They told me they were going to meet you there, but first a meeting was to be had with Delmont, so I rode on with them, and we found the captain and that handsome secretary there awaiting us."

"Preliminaries were quickly arranged for a meeting with swords, and Hastings had demanded that no mercy should be shown by the victor."

"But he was disarmed in an instant, and covering him with the point of his blade, Delmont said he would spare his life, if he would refuse to meet you."

"Did Delmont say this?" asked the judge.

"He did."

"And Hastings refused?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"Delmont demanded a second meeting, and with pistols, and I saw that he meant mischief."

"I was right, for quick as Hastings was, the soldier was quicker and shattered his hand, doing this to prevent a duel with you."

"This was noble in Captain Delmont," said Yesula, earnestly.

"I think so, for he knew Hastings's deadly aim and that he would show you no mercy, Yancey; but he shot just where he aimed, and did just what he intended, that is, put Hastings out of the fight, and it was to save you, for I heard Rolland say that when he knew that you were to fight his principal at sunrise he demanded a meeting at dawn."

The father and daughter glanced at each other and wondered.

They both felt that they owed another deep debt of gratitude to the young soldier, and one that could not be repaid.

And this was the man with whom Judge Yancey had expected a deadly feud, when they should meet, in revenge for the killing of his uncle!

"I have misjudged him."

"His is a noble nature," muttered the judge, while the thought came across the mind of Yesula that Dudley Delmont had acted as he did, in the face of the charge made against her father by Brent Hastings, that he had been the would-be assassin who had fired upon the young captain from an ambush.

"And this is the man who secretly painted my portrait, saved my life, and now my father's, and yet has been the foe of our name since his boyhood! How strange it all is! Dare I demand my portrait of him now? What does it all mean?" and so mused Yesula Yancey, and she felt that the debt that was against her to Dudley Delmont was far beyond payment.

"He saved your life, Yesula, and tried to hide his brave act; he boldly came here with you to offer me his hand, and in face of the fact that I had slain his uncle, and he refused to believe the charge of Hastings, that it was I who had fired on him from an ambush, while, knowing of my meeting with Hastings he anticipated it, and by his deadly aim prevented it. He has overpowered us with obligations, my child, and I see no way to prove our appreciation of all that he has done for us."

So said Judge Yancey to Yesula, as the two sat together upon the piazza that evening, after the departure of Doctor Fairfield, to return to the side of the wounded duelist.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

##### WEDDED.

ALTHOUGH the marriage of Beatrice Delmont to the secretary of the late Commodore Delmont, was to be made public, it yet was to be a private affair, for all concerned so wished it to be.

Beatrice being in mourning for her father, and her having been already secretly united to Aubrey Moore, she wished to avoid any more comment than was necessary, and so it was decided that they should drive down to the river and there cross in the flat ferry-boat, which in favorable winds sailed across to the other shore, and at other times was rowed across by the giant negro ferryman.

The chapel where Commodore Delmont had been wedded to his wife, was upon the Maryland shore, she having been a native of that State, and Aubrey Moore had seemed glad to yield to the wish of the maiden to be married in the same little sanctuary where her brother had been, especially as it would suit Dudley's views, for he wished to catch the semi-weekly boat to Washington after the ceremony, and the landing was not far from the church, and the time could be arranged so as to meet the steamer.

Aubrey Moore and his bride were to then return to The Retreat, where the next day the

lawyer from Fredericksburg would arrive, to arrange the division of the late commodore's estate according to what it would have been, had he not believed his son to be dead.

Having gotten his traps together, and bade King to accompany him as valet, Dudley Delmont went to his sister's room to escort her to the carriage, which was in waiting.

She was very pale, but calm, and he said:

"Come, sister, Moore is already upon the piazza, and the carriage is at the door."

"I am ready, brother; but you have forgotten something."

"Ah! to kiss you and wish you a long life of happiness," and he drew her toward him tenderly, for he dearly loved his beautiful sister.

"I hope it may be so, brother," she said, sadly.

"I do not doubt but that it will be; but are you all ready?"

"Except the diamonds, brother."

"Ah! I had forgotten them."

"I had not," was the low reply.

"Do you really mean that you wish me to give them to you?"

"Yes, brother."

"They are as much yours as mine."

"No, for father always said you should have them."

"Then I will give them to you with more than pleasure. Do you wish them before you go?"

"Yes, for I wish to wear them."

"You are in mourning, and your dress is not suitable for diamonds, sister."

"Still I wish to wear them."

"You seem anxious to prove that there is no fatality attached to them, Bea," said her brother, with a smile.

"I am."

"Then I will get them for you."

He left the room and descended to the library, where he took the Red Diamonds from their hiding-place and then returned up-stairs.

"Here they are, Bea."

"Clasp them on for me, please, Dudley."

He did as she asked him and then kissed her affectionately and then led her from the room.

Aubrey Moore, looking very handsome in his black, well-fitting suit, met them at the piazza, and descended to the carriage with them.

The three entered it, Dudley's baggage being already strapped on behind, and King sprung up with the coachman, who at once sent his spirited horses away at a lively pace.

Lying back upon the cushions, Beatrice drew her veil over her face and was silent, while Aubrey Moore and Dudley talked together upon various subjects.

After a drive of a few miles they approached the river at a point where stood a lonely cabin, the home of Black Ben, a huge negro, almost a giant in size, who was the ferryman.

It was a long run across the river, but the wind blew toward the other shore, and Black Ben raised his square sail and the flat-bottomed ferry-boat started upon its voyage.

"You'll have to pull back, Ben," said Dudley Delmont, for the ferry-boat could not beat against the wind.

"I don't mind that, massa, 'cause I'se us't to it," was the cheery reply, and with his huge sweep the negro guided the lubberly boat upon her way, the coachman and King standing at the head of the restive horses, while Beatrice remained in the carriage, though her brother and Aubrey Moore had alighted.

The wind was fresh, so the boat went along at a fair speed and reached the other shore.

"Wait here, Ben, for within an hour the carriage will return," said Dudley, and the vehicle rolled on its way to the chapel, a mile away.

The white-haired clergyman, who nearly thirty years before had married Commodore Delmont and his wife, was found at his little home, and when told what he was to do, led the way to the little chapel, calling to his daughter, a pretty girl of eighteen, and a neighbor who was passing, to act as witnesses.

In the little brick chapel, surrounded by its many graves, the ceremony was read that made Beatrice Delmont the wife of Aubrey Moore, Dudley giving the bride away, and pretty Lulu Sprague and a young planter who was in love with her, acting as witnesses.

To the little home of the Reverend Mr. Sprague they all adjourned then, the young couple to receive congratulations, and enjoy a glass of wine in which long life and happiness was drank.

Wishing to catch the boat, Dudley Delmont bade his sister and brother-in-law farewell, and springing into the carriage, was hastily driven to the landing, a mile distant.

As the vehicle rolled out of sight Beatrice stretched out her hands toward it, gave a low moan and sunk in a deep swoon upon the floor.

"The strain upon her has been too severe; but she will soon revive," said the kind-hearted clergyman, and he hastily sent for an old negress, who had long been the nurse in his family, and Beatrice was borne to Lulu's room and made as comfortable as possible.

"Had I not best mount my horse and bring Captain Delmont back, sir?" asked the young planter, who, with Lulu, had acted as a witness

to the marriage, and he addressed Aubrey Moore.

"Oh, no, for it was but a fainting spell out of which she will quickly rally, and Captain Delmont had letters this morning which called him to Washington on important business," answered Moore.

But he seemed most anxious the while, as he paced the piazza, until Mr. Sprague came out and told him that his bride had recovered consciousness, and was quite herself again.

"You had better remain with us all night, Mr. Moore, for we have ample room, and I think a storm is threatening," said the clergyman.

"A storm is threatening, sir, but I think we had better go."

"Your wife would really be better for the rest, sir."

"No, we must go, and if you will so tell Mrs. Moore, I shall feel obliged."

Thus urged the clergyman obeyed, and upon the return of the carriage Beatrice was ready to depart.

She was very pale, but moved with a quick step, and asked the coachman:

"Did my brother get away, John?"

"Yes, missy, we got to the landing just as the boat did—there she comes now," and the negro pointed to the steamer, which was gliding swiftly along up the river.

Handkerchiefs were waved as one was seen fluttering on the after-deck, and the tall form of the young soldier was recognized.

Glancing at Beatrice, Aubrey Moore saw that she was perfectly livid and sprung swiftly to her side, for she looked as though she was going to faint.

But she rallied with a mighty effort, while she said, almost harshly:

"Don't mind me, for it is nothing."

"Come, let us start, for I fear the storm will overtake us and night certainly will."

"Yes, for it is sunset now; but Mr. Sprague urges you to remain if you will."

"No, I will go, for I wish to end this suspense."

"What suspense, Beatrice?" he asked, in a low, tender tone.

"Have you forgotten that I wear the Red Diamonds, sir?"

And she laughed; but it was a bitter laugh, and one that he did not like.

But farewells were said, they entered the carriage, and, under godspeeds from the good old minister, the vehicle rolled away back to the river-shore where Black Ben awaited their coming.

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### THE FATAL RED DIAMONDS.

"MASSA, it looks awful black over yonder, sah."

So said Black Ben, the ferryman, as the carriage drove up to the shore, and he pointed to the inky thunderclouds rolling up from beyond the Virginia hills and overspreading the heavens.

Aubrey Moore glanced a moment at the threatening storm, then looked at the river, which was as placid as a mill-pond, and replied:

"We can reach the other side before the storm strikes us, I think, Ben, or at least be so near it as to escape the force of it."

"Dis hain't no sea-boat, massa."

Aubrey Moore heard the remark, but taking a small glass from his pocket swept it over the waters and the hills beyond.

"We will go, Ben," he said, quietly, as though having made up his mind that they could cross without danger.

Black Ben shook his head, but said nothing, and the negro coachman drove down into the ferryboat.

The bars were put up to restrain the horses, and the coachman stood at their heads, while at the request of Aubrey Moore Beatrice left the carriage and stood by his side, as he, with an oar, acted as helmsman.

The stump mast and its sail had been taken down, and Black Ben went forward and seized the large oars, or rather sweeps.

His strong arms managed them as a smaller man might a pair of oars, and the ferryboat moved off at a fair pace just as darkness settled upon the waters.

With the same strong stroke Black Ben held on, until the Maryland shore was a long way off and the Virginia hills began to loom up ahead, though yet the middle of the river had hardly more than been reached.

Before starting from the Virginia side Black Ben had taken a precaution which he never neglected, and that was to light the lamp in his little cabin and set it in the window as a beacon to him upon returning.

At this point the river was miles wide, and in rough weather a high sea would run, so that it was a matter of great peril to be caught out in a storm with the ferryboat.

Still its sides were high, and a combing protected it from washing waves; and it had ridden out several storms which had blanched Black Ben's dark face to an ashen hue.

Standing nearer her husband, Beatrice had watched the progress of the boat, showing no

fear by expressions of alarm, but hiding all dread she might feel by silence.

Now and then, as he held on his way, Aubrey Moore would address a cheering word to Black Ben, whose stroke was as steady as machinery, and seemingly as untiring.

Then he would say something to Beatrice in a low, soothing tone, and her reply would be short and in a voice that one hearing it would have deemed reckless of consequences, for once, after being spoken to by her husband, she answered:

"Ben is doing his best, John is caring for the horses and you are pilot, while I can do nothing, so let us wait and see, Aubrey, what the result will be."

It was very evident that she felt the influence of the Red Diamonds, and wondered if they would prove fatal to her, as they had to others; but, whatever was in her thoughts regarding them, she had certainly schooled herself to meet the alternative.

The same motive which had prompted her to defy their fatality, and urge her brother to give them to her as a bridal present, controlled her now to meet the end, should it come, without dread.

The horses at first behaved well, under the control of John, who stood at their heads; but, as the darkness increased, and the wind rose, the boat began to ride the waves roughly, and the animals seemed hard to control.

Then came the thunder, muttered at first, but soon it grew deep and ominous, and a blinding flash of lightning lit up the river and the shores.

A call of alarm came from John, and Aubrey Moore said quickly:

"Beatrice, you take this oar and steer straight for that light, for you are a good oarswoman, and it is fast on an iron pin, so the work will not be overhard."

"I must go to aid John with the horses, or they may swamp us."

He spoke with perfect calmness, not an atom of fear being visible in his voice, and in obedience Beatrice took the handle of the long oar with the quiet remark:

"I can keep the boat on her way, so do not mind me, Aubrey."

"You are a brave little woman," he replied and hastened to the aid of John, who had his hands full with the frightened horses.

The railing on either side rose almost as high as the backs of the horses, and before them, and behind the carriage, stout bars had been placed, so that the animals and the vehicle were in a pen as it were.

In the space aft, some ten feet long, by eight in width, Beatrice stood, at the helm, and forward, where there was the same space, sat Black Ben at the long sweeps.

The boat rocked now, then plunged a little, and next staggered under a heavy wave; but it never ceased its onward motion under the strong arms of Black Ben, and thus far no water had been taken inside.

But the storm had now broken in fury, and the howling of the winds, the crashing of the thunder and vivid flashes of lightning were appalling.

To the horses Aubrey Moore and John clung with all their might; but the animals became mad with fear, and threatened to bound over the side and swamp them.

"It must be done, John," at last said Aubrey Moore.

"What, massa?"

"Kill them!"

"Oh, massa!"

"It is their life or ours! Hold hard a moment!"

He ran to the carriage and leaned into it an instant; then he sprung to the side of Beatrice and said:

"Do not be alarmed at my firing, Bea, for the horses must be killed, or we will all be lost."

"Will killing those poor dumb brutes save us, Aubrey?" she asked with strange calmness.

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Without doubt."

"Then sacrifice the brute for the human," she said, as she tugged at her oar, and kept her eyes steadily on the light ahead, for, as the boat was high at each end and low in the middle, she could see over the top of the carriage.

Aubrey Moore bent over and kissed the brave girl, and then hastened forward.

He was just in time, for the off horse had reared up and gotten his forefeet over the railing.

A flash of the pistol came, and the muzzle was almost against the head of the animal. A wild shriek, almost human, and the horse fell dead in the bottom of the boat, dragging his mate down upon his knees.

"Don't kill him, massa, for we kin hold him, sah, I guesses," cried John, with tears in his eyes at the fate of his dearly-loved horses.

"No, he must die, too, for we are needed to help Black Ben, for don't you see the waves knock us off our course?"

For a moment the horse, as though appalled at the fate of his mate, had remained still; but

only for an instant, and then he arose with a wild neigh and frightful bound.

At once the pistol in the hand of Aubrey Moore cracked, and the animal dropped upon his knees.

But he was not slain, and rose with a furious plunge that swayed the boat wildly.

Then came a second shot and he fell dead, and, just as he did so a huge wave boarded the boat, snapping in twain one of Black Ben's oars, while a terrific peal of thunder rent the heavens, and the blinding glare of lightning that lit up momentarily the blackness showed that the boat was doomed, for, right upon it almost, bearing down under close-reefed sails, was a schooner driven before the tempest.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### SUPERSTITION.

THE business which had called Dudley Delmont to Washington was a letter from the War Department, summoning him to appear and verbally make known all particulars in his power regarding the assassination of Captain Mortimer Bainbridge out at the frontier post.

He had been given a wounded furlough, and was known to be at home, and so had been written to there.

Promptly he had obeyed the summons, and it was on account of having received orders to report that he was anxious to see his sister married at once to Aubrey Moore.

Then, too, he desired to still any scandal-monger's tongue that might wag at the fact that Beatrice was left alone at The Retreat with the young secretary.

The marriage which had been secretly entered into between the two, a short while before, he ignored, as it had been a secret one; but with a marriage where he gave the bride away, and which had been performed before witnesses, in the chapel where his parents had been wedded, and by the same clergyman, he knew no one could cavil at, or would dare to do so.

Hence he had gone to the chapel, and thence taken the steamboat to Washington, leaving the young couple to return to The Retreat, where he hoped to find them happily situated upon his return within a week.

It was true that Aubrey Moore was considerably the senior of his sister, being past thirty, and he knew little of his antecedents; but then he had come to his father well recommended, was certainly a gentleman, courtly in his manners, handsome, and had traveled extensively in foreign lands, while he spoke several foreign languages.

If he was poor, Beatrice was rich, and his father had left in his will a few thousand dollars for his secretary, and it had been his wish that Beatrice should become his wife.

Then Dudley greatly liked the man, though there was a reserve about him which Beatrice even had not seemed to break through; but she seemed wholly wrapped up in him, as he did in her, and his gentle manner, ever most respectful in addressing her, indicated that she would be in tender keeping.

The storm struck the steamboat miles above the ferry, and caused even that stanch craft to reel and sway under its force, and many of the passengers were greatly alarmed; but Dudley Delmont thought not of danger to himself and those about him.

His thoughts were with his sister and Aubrey Moore.

Had the flat-boat been caught in that storm?

If so, had it not gone to the bottom?

"No, Aubrey Moore has been a sailor, he told me, and would not risk crossing in the face of that storm," he said to himself.

"Then too Black Ben would not put off if he did not know that he had time to reach the other shore."

"I am foolish to be alarmed," and so saying he lighted a cigar and stood under the lee of the cabin watching and enjoying the storm.

Suddenly he started, as though some one had struck him, and his heart almost ceased its beating with the dread that came upon him.

"My God! the Red Diamonds!"

The words were few that broke from his lips, but they expressed his thoughts.

Suddenly before his gaze had flashed that fatal necklace!

He seemed to have seen them sparkling in the flashing lightning, and to his gaze they looked like rubies, not diamonds, for they appeared blood-red.

"Bah! I am a superstitious fool after all."

"I have boasted that not an atom of superstition was in my composition, and yet, because Beatrice wears those red stones—ruby diamonds, I mean, for they are not red, I find myself fearful of harm befalling her."

"I will banish such spooky thoughts."

But, try as he might, he could not banish his dread of that necklace.

Its history came back to him in all its vividness, and his brain seemed to gloat in recalling its fatality, in spite of his will.

He remembered all that his father had told about them; how, away back early in the "Thirties," he, Commodore Delmont, then a lieutenant, commanding a schooner-of-war, had captured a pirate craft in the West Indies, but

had been too late to save from death a beautiful captive of the buccaneer, as he supposed her to be, for he had found her lying dead upon the cabin floor, a dagger grasped in her hand, a deep wound in her breast, and the magnificent necklace about her neck crimsoned with her blood.

Some strange motive, what he could not explain, his father had told him, had urged him to take those diamonds as his own, and he so turned in their value, as prize-money, until the diamonds were divided among the officers and crew, and they became his property.

What their history was before, Commodore Delmont did not know, other than that the pirate had placed them about the neck of his captive, and fastened them there with the secret clasp upon the necklace.

Then the schooner-of-war had come upon the buccaneer, the pirate captain had rushed to his deck, and once had so nearly beaten off the American cruiser that the maiden, in her despair, had taken her own life, believing all was lost.

But the pirate craft had been taken, and the chief was promptly swung up in mid-air, his possession of the necklace having proven alike fatal to him.

Then through the mind of the young army officer flitted the remembrance of his father having given them as a bridal gift, and the fate of the bride, and how her mother, attending the theater one night with the Red Diamonds about her neck, had been suffocated by the flames of the burning building.

So nervous did all these memories make Dudley Delmont, along with the remembrance that in his will his father had altogether ignored the fatal necklace, that he pictured to himself, in spite of his strong will, evil to his sister.

"Try as I may to hide it, I am superstitious," he muttered.

"Yes, in spite of my good sense, in spite of my ridicule of superstition, I this moment feel that harm has befallen poor Beatrice.

"Without that fatal necklace the same evil, whatever it may be, might have befallen her; but the fact remains that she wore it to-day, this day of her marriage!

"I will telegraph Moore as soon as I reach the city, and have the message sent by special messenger from the town, for my duty calls me to remain in Washington, and I cannot endure the delay of writing, and then awaiting an answer."

It was long after midnight when the boat reached Washington; but Dudley Delmont hastened to the telegraph office and sent a message to the nearest town to The Retreat Plantation, and which was distant over twenty miles therefrom.

The telegram was addressed to Aubrey Moore, Esquire, and read:

"Does all go well at home? Answer immediately!"

Then the young soldier sought his hotel, but not to sleep, for his brain was busy with dread of evil tidings, and early he appeared at the War Department to make his report of the assassination of his friend Captain Mortimer Bainbridge.

He told his story of how he had been hurt and Captain Bainbridge had ridden his horse to the fort, thus, evidently, from this fact and their resemblance to each other having been mistaken for him by the assassin.

But who that assassin was no one could discover, and it had been proven a mystery beyond unavailing by all at the fort.

Having made his report Dudley Delmont returned to his hotel.

It was late in the afternoon, and he hoped that there might be an answer to his telegram.

There was a telegram for him, if not an answer to his, and it read:

"Come home by first boat. Don't delay! don't fail me. AUBREY MOORE."

"My God! I feared it. There is something in superstition, after all," came from his lips, and five minutes after he was driving down to the boat which was just leaving on her trip down the river as he reached the wharf.

But he hailed the captain in a voice that commanded attention, and the steamer came slowly back to the end of the pier and he sprang on board.

"I thank you, sir, for it is a case of life and death with me," he said, in his courtly way to the captain, though his heart and brain seemed on fire with suspense.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### CAST UP BY THE WAVES.

THE steamboat made good time down the Potomac, but to Dudley Delmont, who was most anxious to get home and end his suspense, for he knew not what had happened, the boat went at a snail's pace.

But at last she arrived at the landing where he wished to be put off, just above the ferry, and the sun was rising as he sprang on shore, and, followed by his negro valet, King, started

to walk down to Black Ben's cabin, hoping there to catch some vehicle going toward The Retreat.

Upon reaching the cabin they found it closed and all was desolate about it.

The heart of the young soldier sunk within him as he saw that the ferry-boat was not at its accustomed place; and more, there were no fresh evidences that there had been any crossing at that point for the past twenty-four hours.

"This looks bad, King," he said.

"Yas, massa, awful bad; but I hopes it only looks so, sah," answered the negro with deep feeling, for he was greatly attached to his young mistress.

"Well, we will hide the luggage, King, and start for The Retreat at once to avoid this fearful suspense," said Dudley Delmont, and they were soon after walking rapidly along on their way to the Delmont Plantation.

There was a path that bordered the river for a short distance, and it cut off considerable distance to one on foot, who would not have to follow the roadway, and this the young soldier and his valet took.

Just as they were about to leave the river-path and strike off into the hills, the quick eye of Dudley Delmont fell upon an object lying upon the shore which brought him to an instant standstill.

What he saw was a human form, and it lay but a few feet from the water's edge, having evidently been washed there by the large waves formed by the storm two nights before.

Instantly Delmont pointed out the body to King, and the two ran quickly down the bank to the spot where it lay.

"Oh, massa! it is Coachman John," cried the negro, recognizing the black face of the driver of the Delmont family carriage.

"King, you are right, it is poor John," and Dudley Delmont gazed down into the face of the negro, and then upon the clothes, which were torn badly by the body being dashed upon the shore by the waves.

"I fear it means that all are lost, King, for the boat is not here, Black Ben has certainly not been back to his cabin, and there are no carriage-tracks to denote a vehicle crossing since the storm."

"All went down, I fear, King," and the voice of the young soldier quivered with emotion, as he thought of the dread fate of his beautiful sister.

"But the telegram, massa, from Massa Moore?"

"True, he certainly escaped, and we must press on to know all the truth, and you can come back in a wagon for the body of poor John—but see!" and Dudley Delmont bent over the body of the negro and pointed to a wound in the black forehead.

"He has been hurt by a rock, sah."

"No, that is a bullet-wound as sure as I live! look here!"

Dudley Delmont took a pencil from his pocket, as he spoke and inserted the end into the wound.

It penetrated readily, showing that a bullet had certainly caused the death of the faithful coachman.

King looked bewildered and the face of the soldier wore a puzzled expression.

"King?"

"Yas, massa."

"Do not speak of this to any one."

"No, sah."

"I mean of this wound in the head of poor John."

"No, sah."

"Let them think it was made by striking the edge of a rock, when washed ashore."

"Yas, massa."

"I shall trust you, King, in this, for if there has been foul play we can only find out the truth by acting secretly in the matter."

"Now let us go."

The body was drawn up on the bank and placed on a large rock, and then they started on their way, walking rapidly, and the soldier so wrapped up in his own painful meditations that he seemed not to hear the remarks several times addressed to him by the negro.

At last the grand old home came in sight in the distance, and soon after, by a cut across the fields they reached the mansion.

Pacing up and down the broad piazza, which encircled the house on three sides, was Aubrey Moore.

His hands were behind his back and clasped firmly together, while his pace was now slow, now rapid, according to the thoughts passing through his brain.

His walk was the full length of the piazza, and when he reached the center, from whence a view of the driveway was visible, he would pause and glance down the avenue, as though expecting some one.

His face was pale, very sad-looking, and his lips were set firmly together, as though to check his bitter thoughts from finding vent in words.

Suddenly he heard steps upon the gravel drive, and starting he turned quickly to discover Captain Delmont with his foot upon the lower

step, for coming across the lawn he had not been before seen.

"Thank God he has come," broke from the lips of Aubrey Moore, and he sprang to meet the young master of The Retreat, as he rapidly ascended the broad steps leading up to the piazza.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ANOTHER VICTIM.

"My dear Dudley! she is dead!"

So said Aubrey Moore, as he sprang forward and grasped the hand of his brother-in-law, his face writhing with emotion and his voice broken as he uttered the words.

It was a bitter blow to Dudley Delmont, for the words told him that his worst fears were realized—that his sister was dead.

But in his own grief he could not but feel for the sorrow-stricken man before him, the husband of the dead bride.

"Dead?" he repeated after Aubrey Moore, as though to get the full meaning of the word into his heart and brain.

"Yes, she rests at the bottom of the Potomac."

"Come into the library, and I will tell you all."

And the quivering voice showed how hard was the effort at self-control made by the speaker.

Turning to King who open-eyed stood on the steps, Dudley Delmont said:

"King, my sister is dead."

"They were lost, as I supposed, in the storm."

"Get a wagon and some of the men and go after John's body and have others there to search the shore for the remains of my poor sister."

King bowed, for he could not speak and turned away, while his master followed Aubrey Moore into the library, whither he had gone.

The secretary was pacing the room in a restless way, and Dudley, throwing himself into a chair, nerved himself to hear all, for he said:

"Tell me just what has happened, Aubrey, for I feel stunned by what I have heard thus far."

"Are you superstitious, Dudley?" asked Aubrey Moore, dropping in his grief, as Dudley Delmont had done, the formality of calling the other by his last name.

"Ha! you refer to the Red Diamonds?" and Dudley Delmont groaned.

"Yes; she wore them."

"Alas! I gave them to her."

"Do not censure yourself for that, Dudley, for some strange fatality urged Beatrice to ask you to do so, and she begged your father for them, as I know."

"I should have been firm and not given them to her."

"No, for you are not a believer in superstition, and you looked upon them only as a superb wedding-gift, in spite of their unlucky history."

"True; but they have proven fatal now."

"No, it was accidental only, for whether she wore the Red Diamond necklace or not, she would have been lost."

"Tell me of it, Aubrey," and with a shudder the young soldier covered his face with his hands.

"To begin with, after your departure your sister fainted, and it was some time before we revived her."

"Yes, the incidents of late had impressed her too deeply, for I was reported dead, then father's death, her marriage and all, caused even her strong nature to give way."

"But her swoon was nothing serious?"

"No, for she seemed all right after it, and refusing the kind invitation of Mr. Sprague and his daughter to remain, we started for the ferry, John driving rapidly, as we were anxious to cross before the storm broke, which you doubtless noticed was rising when you drove to catch the steamboat?"

"Yes, and my anxiety was such that I telegraphed you as I did, for it was a terrible storm."

"Your telegram came after I had sent mine, Dudley."

"I knew that you would come, though I hardly understood by which way, so sent no one to meet you."

"But we reached the ferry, and Black Ben thought we could get across, as I did also."

"It was growing dark, and Black Ben rowed with a strength that was surprising; but, as the storm drew nearer and chop seas rose, the horses became restive and I had to aid John in holding them, your sister bravely taking the steering-oar and managing it splendidly."

"With the increase of the storm, and the thunder and lightning, the horses became mad with fear, threatening, in spite of our efforts, to spring over the side and swamp the boat."

"So I decided to shoot them."

"Ah! you showed presence of mind in that, Moore," said Dudley, with admiration in his tone.

"I shot one, then the other, and was hoping all would be well, when the storm broke with its greatest fury and I beheld a schooner driving down directly upon us."

"I hailed as loudly as I could, while I sprang

to where Beatrice bravely stood at the steering-oar.

"I had just reached her side when the crash came and we went down under the schooner's bows.

"I grasped at Beatrice, and, strange to say, seized hold of that fatal necklace."

"My God!" groaned Dudley Delmont.

"The clasp broke and left it in my hand, and in the wild wash of the waters, your sister disappeared. I swam about like one mad, hailing the schooner, then calling Beatrice, and then Black Ben and John; but no response came and I felt that all was lost, while the schooner bore on her way in the storm, leaving only wreck and death behind.

"By the lightning, which was most vivid, I tried to catch sight of the shattered boat, or of your sister and the men; but I could see nothing, and I would also have gone down, had not my hand struck some floating object. It was one of the oars of the ferry-boat, and seizing it I supported myself and steadily swam shoreward.

"It was a desperate struggle for life, but at last I reached the shore and staggered out beyond the wash of the waves, when I fell down, utterly exhausted.

"I must have been unconscious, for at last it seemed that I was waking up from a deep sleep, and, to my horror, I found clasped in my hand the Red Diamond necklace! It had broken loose, as I said, when I grasped it, and in all my struggles for life I had held to that fatal chain of gems."

"This was indeed strange, Aubrey; but, you could find no trace of my poor sister?"

"None, though I dragged myself here and by dawn had half a hundred negroes searching the shore for her body. Planters and their servants joined in the search, but though the oar that supported me was found, and a cushion from the carriage, nothing else could we find of the fateful affair, and late in the afternoon we gave it up and I returned home, believing with others that the bodies had been swept on down the river, the boat also, while the heavy carriage had dragged the horses, hitched to it as they were, to the bottom."

"It is a most appalling blow, my dear Aubrey, to both of us, and bowed down in my deep grief I know not what to say to console you, who I can see have suffered fearfully.

"But, as King and myself came along the shore, we found the body of John the coachman, washed up by the waves, and a closer search to-day may discover my poor sister, and Black Ben."

"True, and search must be made; but where was the body of the coachman?"

"On the shore near the foot-path skirting the hill back of Black Ben's cabin."

"Then the others should be near it."

"Yes; but let me tell you a strange circumstance."

"Well, Dudley?"

"In the center of John's forehead is a bullet-wound."

"Great God! can I have shot him when I was firing at the horses?"

And the face of Aubrey Moore grew more pallid.

"It would seem that such is the proper solution of the bullet-wound; but I bade King say nothing about it, and so we will drop it; but do not blame yourself, Aubrey, for it could not have been helped, and John would doubtless have been drowned had the bullet not shot him, and I only marvel at your escape."

"I remember now that the poor fellow sunk down after one of my shots, but I believed then that he was dragged down by the horse he was holding. This is fearful, Dudley, and comes upon me with double force added to my other affliction."

"I am sorry I spoke of it; but it looked like a strange circumstance to me; yet, after all, it may be a blow from striking on a rock, or a nail in the boat."

"No, I fear your first idea is right, Dudley; but now let us have breakfast, for we must keep our strength up, and then we will go on the search for the body of our lost darling."

And in his own grief Dudley Delmont could not help but feel for the splendid man who had lost his young bride, whom he had made an idol of.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A FOREBODING OF EVIL.

COACHMAN JOHN was buried in the little burying ground near the slaves' quarters on the Delmont Plantation, and a sad burial it was, too, and the negroes for miles around attended the funeral.

But the bodies of Beatrice and Black Ben could not be found, though the river shores were searched for scores of miles most thoroughly.

They had evidently gotten into a different current and been borne out to sea.

The wrecked flatboat also was missing, and after days of search Dudley Delmont and Aubrey Moore were forced to give up all hope of ever finding the body of the beautiful sister and bride.

Most deeply did the neighbors feel for the brother and groom in their great grief and many shook their heads ominously when they spoke of The Retreat, for with the mishaps there of late and the story of the Red Diamonds being known, it was whispered that a curse must have fallen upon the Delmonts.

The story of the marriage across the river was made known, and all sympathy was felt for the young bride, who had been torn from life upon the very threshold of its enjoyment.

When all hope was given up, Dudley determined upon his future course. He was seated with Aubrey Moore in the library of The Retreat one night, some ten days after the dire mishap, and he said:

"Aubrey, I have determined to return to my regiment in a few days."

"What! so soon, Dudley, and your leave not one-third out?" asked Aubrey Moore, with surprise.

"Yes, for only gloom seems to hang over the old home here, and, but for your presence, I should have gone the day of my return from Washington."

"It is filled with bitter memories, Dudley; but yet I love to linger here where poor Beatrice has lived her short life."

"I wish you to remain here, if you will, Aubrey, and would like to talk with you now upon the subject."

"Certainly."

"You remember that father left all of his wealth to my sister, believing me to be dead, and that, ere she signed the papers giving me back my share, she lost her life?"

"Yes, I remember it but too well."

"Now her share I wish you to have, for she would so have left it to you, I feel assured, and my share I will claim, for in law I could, she being dead, and I the only heir, claim it all."

"I well know that, Dudley, and it is most generous for you to wish to share the property with me."

"No, for the estate is a vast one, and will make us both rich, while I have invested in some mines out West, which are beginning to pay largely."

"Now I have no near kindred, Aubrey, and my race is about run out, so I wish to make my will before going, making you my heir, and Judge Yancey can draw up the papers for us in the morning."

"But, Dudley, I cannot think of allowing this, and—"

"It must be so, for I know of no one else than yourself to leave my fortune to."

"But you will live for many long years yet, I am sure."

"I hope so; but still a soldier's life is uncertain, and I wish to live prepared for death."

"Then too a fatality seems to dog the steps of my race of late, and I must not forget that."

"I will therefore make my will, as I say, and you are to remain here as master of The Retreat until I return, or marry."

"You are most generous, Dudley."

"No, for I wish the place kept up, and you will do that."

"And the Red Diamonds?" and Aubrey Moore spoke in a low tone, and with hesitation.

"Curses upon them! I wish they were sunk into the bottomless pit."

"But I shall keep them, and by holding them defy the Fate that seems to attend them."

"Keep them, Aubrey, for me, and I will not mention them in my will; but should I die they are yours, and may they bring you better fortune than they have brought to my race," and the brow of Dudley Delmont darkened as he remembered the unlucky necklace.

The next day Judge Yancey was sent for to come to The Retreat, and the will of Dudley Delmont was made, as he had said, signed, and witnessed by the overseer of the Plantation.

Then the young soldier drove back with the judge to River Glade and bade farewell to Yesula, who still had not the courage to ask him for her portrait, and why he had painted it.

But he bade her good-by, and the thought was in his heart that one day he would see her again, and he hoped that that meeting would not be tinged with sorrow.

Two days after that he bade The Retreat farewell, Aubrey Moore accompanying him to town, where he took the train, and the two thus parted, a feeling, a dread in the breast of Dudley Delmont that a strange fatality yet dogged his steps.

Whether he was right or wrong will soon be told.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A RENEGADE'S HORROR.

In a wild canyon in the far West, about a month after the departure of Dudley Delmont from The Retreat Plantation in old Virginia, a band of red-skins were assembled.

There were a dozen or more, and they lay about upon the grass in a listless kind of way, with all the patience of Indians and wild beasts when waiting for their prey to come into their clutches.

Their horses were staked out behind them,

and silence reigned in the little temporary camp.

They were a wild-looking set, in all the glory of their war-paint and feathers, and most thoroughly armed they were with bows and arrows, and an occasional rifle or pistol.

Soon the sound of hoofs came to their ears, and instantly they were on the alert to greet friend or foe.

A moment more and a horseman appeared in sight, coming at a canter up the canyon, through which a trail ran which seemed to be often traveled.

The horseman was well-mounted, and, contrary to those he approached, rode a Texan saddle, while a rifle hung from his saddle-horn, and a pair of revolvers and bowie-knife were in his belt.

He was dressed in Indian costume, with the addition of a yellow jacket, evidently made of dyed buckskin, and his gorgeous head-dress indicated that he held the rank of chief.

His face was painted hideously, and yet not so thoroughly as to disguise the fact that he was not a red-skin, but a white man.

In perfect Sioux, however, he said, as he rode up:

"Let my braves mount and draw out of sight."

"Our foes come."

They obeyed in silence, and as they withdrew to the shelter of some dense foliage, bordering either side of the canyon, they were soon securely hidden from the view of any one approaching along the trail.

The white chief, who was known as Yellow Jacket, for the Indians always give names to their own race and pale-faces from some peculiarity about them, rode up to each one of his warriors and said something in a low tone, and to which he received a nod or a grunt of assent.

Having given his orders the chief returned to his position, furthest down the canyon, and waited, with a patience evidently learned by long schooling among the Indians.

A half-hour passed, and there came the sound of hoof-falls upon the pebbly bottom of the canyon.

Soon after a horseman appeared in sight, and he was followed a moment after by several more.

The one in advance was dressed in buckskin, a white man, and rode along with the air of one who was closely following a trail.

In fact, he was the guide of the party, and he did not half like the traces he saw in the canyon of others having been there very lately.

Those who followed him were, first, an officer in the uniform of a captain, well mounted and armed, and behind him came a negro leading a pack-horse, and then four cavalymen bringing up the rear.

The guide halted, not thirty paces from where the renegade white chief was in ambush, and said, addressing the officer:

"I don't like the signs here, Captain Delmont, and think we had better turn back and flank this canyon."

"It is a long ride around, is it not, guide?"

"Yes, sir; some twenty miles."

"I am anxious to get on to the fort by night, so would like to keep on through the canyon, if you do not urge against it."

"I only came upon the signs a hundred rods back, sir, though one hoof-track I followed from the entrance to the valley."

"And what do you make out of the signs?"

"The single hoof-tracks are made by a shod horse, the others by unshod ponies, and it looks to me as though an ambush was intended, the one on the animal whose tracks I first saw having been on picket duty to report our coming."

"Well, do as you deem best, for I have no right to risk other lives than my own, and I see for myself a number of trails about us."

"We will go around, sir, for there are red-skins about, I am sure," said the brave but cautious guide.

As he spoke he turned his horse to ride back down the valley, when suddenly there rung out half-a-dozen shots, and a shower of arrows came flying from out of the dense foliage.

The horse of the guide fell under the fire, the animal ridden by the officer was wounded, and one of the soldiers dropped dead from his saddle.

It was a complete surprise, and following it came dashing out of their ambush the white chief and his red warriors.

"Rally, men, and give them a volley! then fly down the canyon!"

The voice of Dudley Delmont rung like a trumpet, and, following the flash of his own revolver, the rifle of the guide and carbines of the soldiers opened fire.

Indian ponies and red-skin warriors went down under the well-aimed fire, and then the troopers turned in flight, for they saw that they were vastly outnumbered.

King, Dudley Delmont's valet, leading his pack-horse, also went dashing down the canyon; but the young officer was not one to fly and leave a comrade on foot, to die alone.

He saw that the guide was on foot, and wounded, and he instantly dashed up to his side.

"Come, spring up behind me!" he cried.

But, as the guide attempted to do so, the horse of the officer, wounded badly, fell to the ground, and the next instant the red-skins were upon them.

There was a sharp, short fight, and the guide was slain, while Dudley Delmont was wounded, and would have shared the same fate, but that Yellow Jacket sprung before him and called out to his warriors to spare him.

They obeyed, and Dudley Delmont staggered to his feet, though bleeding from several wounds, and confronted his captor.

"And you are Captain Dudley Delmont?" said Yellow Jacket, stepping close up to him.

"I am."

"You do not know me, sir?" and there was a marked respect in the voice and manner of the man.

"You appear to be a renegade, allied to red-skins, and warring against your race," was the reply.

"I am, sir, for I am none other than Dick Darke, the deserter from your regiment."

"Ah! I know you now, Darke, and, bad as men called you, I am surprised to see you so evil as I now find you."

"I am a bad man, captain. Went bad from boyhood, and will die a worse one; but I remember that you once saved me from being hanged by my comrades, for stealing, and brought me off the field at the risk of your own life, the day I was wounded in the valley fight."

"I came on this trail to ambush you, and wipe out your party, but I did not know you were along, or I would not have attacked you."

"I'm a renegade, Captain Delmont, but I have honor enough to spare your life, and not kill you as I intended, when I did not know who you were."

"But you are wounded, and suffering, for you can hardly stand."

"Come, sir, my warriors will carry you to our village and care for you," and the renegade gave certain orders to his red-skin braves, who quickly brought a horse for the wounded officer to mount, which he did when Yellow Jacket had bound up his wounds with consummate skill, for he had been a surgeon's assistant at the fort, and understood just what to do.

The only thing that seemed to trouble him was the fact that Dudley Delmont seemed badly wounded, he feared, fatally.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### THE SOLDIER'S LETTER.

It was a sad blow to Yesula Yancey to feel that Beatrice, whom she had met and felt could learn to dearly love, had been taken so suddenly out of life, by going to her death that night of storm upon the Potomac.

"So young, so beautiful, and just made the wife of a man whom she seemed wholly wrapt up in, it is sad, indeed, and Mr. Moore has my deepest sympathy," she said to her father one day after hearing the news.

"And so has Dudley Delmont mine," the judge had answered.

"Yes, father, and mine; but I was thinking then of the lover, not the brother."

"Mr. Moore idolized Beatrice, and his grief must be deeper than Captain Delmont's, though the latter was devoted to his sister."

"Well, Moore has been left a handsome fortune by his wife's death, and Delmont thinks so much of him that he has made his will in his favor, and the chances are that he'll get killed, for report has it that he is one of the most daring officers in the service, and out on the frontier he is in constant danger."

"It will seem strange to have the grand old home of the Delmonts pass into other hands," said the judge.

"Strange, and sad, too."

"I hope such will not be the case," said Yesula, thoughtfully.

From that day her father seemed to think that she became more serious, passed more time out sketching and preferred to be alone.

"Does aught trouble you, my child?" he asked one day, as he saw an expression upon Yesula's face that was full of sadness.

"No, father, nothing that I can remedy," she answered, and then added:

"Have you heard how Mr. Hastings was?"

"Yes, he is improving slowly, the doctors say, and will soon be about once more."

"Do you know I have a dread of him, father, ever though he may have but one arm?"

"He certainly is harmless now, Yesula."

"Dudley Delmont took good care of that."

"I only wish that I could think so, sir; but he is a bad, bold man, and I fear him."

"Don't let him worry you, my child."

"But it does, and I only beg of you to watch him; yes, and his second, Reuben Rolland, too, for I dread both men, and fear they will plot mischief as soon as Breck Hastings gets thoroughly well."

"I will keep my eyes upon them, my dear, so do not worry."

"Now, let us go and take a ride on horseback, for it will do us both good."

Yesula went to her room to put on her riding-habit, while her father ordered the horses.

As she came out upon the piazza, looking very beautiful in her handsomely-fitting riding costume, she saw a horseman riding slowly up the avenue.

"It is Mr. Moore from The Retreat," said her father, who was booted and spurred ready for the ride.

She had met Aubrey Moore the day that he had come with Dudley Delmont to make his will, and she had several times seen him and admired his fine form and strikingly handsome face.

That he was a man to win a maiden's heart she could well understand, and she did not wonder that Beatrice, thrown with him so constantly as she had been, had learned to love him.

He was dressed in a dark riding-suit, which indicated that he had rather come upon business than to make a social visit, which the judge had several times invited him to do, since the burial of the war-hatchet between the River Glade and Retreat families.

As he dismounted, Chips, called by the judge, took Aubrey Moore's horse, and he was met at the piazza steps with a cordial greeting.

Yesula had observed that his face was pale and careworn, and she felt that he had come upon some important matter to consult her father, so, after greeting him, she started to retire, when Aubrey Moore said:

"Pray, do not depart, Miss Yancey, for I will remain but a few minutes, so as not to prevent your ride, which I see you were about starting on."

His voice was low, and Yesula thought strangely musical, while she yet saw that his face was full of trouble.

"Have you heard from Captain Delmont, Mr. Moore?"

The question came to her lips with a great dread of a reply, and yet she could not have refrained from asking it had her life depended on it.

"It is to tell you of Captain Delmont that I have come, and I want to say that it is the saddest news."

He gazed into her eyes as he spoke, saw her start and turn pale, and then came her question in a voice that quivered greatly:

"Is he dead?"

"No, no, I hope not so bad as that, Mr. Moore," the judge added quickly, but anxiously, for he feared the worst.

"I received a letter to-day from King, Dudley's valet, written at his dictation by an officer at the fort, and I will read it to you, for I came to tell you how sad indeed were the tidings."

Without a word Yesula sunk into a chair, her face partly turned away from her father and Aubrey Moore, while the latter having taken a seat, drew from his pocket a letter and read it aloud.

It was dated at the port at which Dudley Delmont had been stationed, and was as follows:

"MR. AUBREY MOORE:—

"DEAR SIR:—At the request of King, the negro body-servant of my friend, Mr. Dudley Delmont, I write to tell you that we have grave fears that that gallant officer is dead."

He was returning to his command, accompanied only by a guide, his valet and four soldiers, and should not have ventured from the fort without a larger escort."

"In a canyon a few hours' journey from the fort the party were attacked by a large band of Indians, headed by a white renegade once a soldier in the company of Captain Delmont."

"Fired upon from ambush, King says the guide's horse was killed and the animal ridden by his master wounded, while one of the soldiers in the rear was shot dead."

"Captain Delmont endeavored to check the charge of the red-skins by a volley, but, though several fell, the rest came on, and he ordered the soldiers and negro to fly for their lives."

"They started off at full speed and the captain was following them, when he saw the guide was wounded and left alone, and, just like his noble nature, he turned back to try and save him."

"The negro says that he reached the guide, who was mounting behind him, when he saw the horse fall, and then the Indians were upon the two, who went down under their fire or the rush over them."

"The negro and two of the soldiers got away, a second trooper falling under the fire of the red-skins who pursued, and they reached the fort the next day."

"I went out with a large force to the scene of conflict, but though there were traces of a hot fight and the two dead bodies of the horses of my lamented friend Delmont and the guide, no trace of them could be found, nor could we discover their remains."

"I followed the trail of the red-skins into the mountains and was then forced to return, and we all fear here at the fort that Delmont has certainly perished."

"As soon as we get reinforcements, it is the intention of the general to take the trail direct to the Indian village and give them battle, hoping almost against hope that we will find Delmont a prisoner among them."

"Official reports will at once be sent to Washington regarding the affair, and should I learn other particulars I will at once communicate with you."

"In conclusion King would have me to say that, should he discover that his master is really dead, he will then start home with his traps, all of which he has, for Captain Delmont's trunk was left at the post to be brought by wagon-train to the fort."

"I will myself see that all are given into the

hands of the faithful servant, who, I may add, deeply feels the loss of his master, if dead he is."

"Should you wish to communicate with me, address as below."

"I have the honor to be, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"DUKE VAN DORN,

"Captain B Company,

"—th Cavalry."

In his low, distinct and musical voice Aubrey Moore had read the letter of Captain Van Dorn, his eyes now and then glancing at Yesula, as though fearful of its effect upon her.

As he finished he saw her head droop forward, and springing to her side caught her in his strong arms just as she was falling.

She had fainted away.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### A WOMAN'S PLEADING.

AUBREY MOORE was seated upon the broad piazza of The Retreat.

It was the day after his visit to River Glade, when he had made known the contents of Van Dorn's letter, and his face yet wore a look of sorrow and anxiety.

The thought that, if the news was true, and Dudley Delmont was really dead, he was lord and master of The Retreat, had not cleared up the clouds upon his face.

Suddenly, as his eyes glanced down the avenue leading to the mansion, he saw two persons on horseback approaching.

One he at once recognized as Yesula Yancey.

The other his acquaintance with was more limited, but it was Chips, the young negro lad who was Yesula's black shadow.

At a lope the maiden came up the avenue, and behind her mounted on a shaggy mustang was Chips.

Aubrey Moore arose and descended the steps to meet her as she rode up, and doffing his hat, bent gracefully before her, as was his courtly way.

"May I ask you to alight, Miss Yancey, and take a glass of sherry?" he asked, though he did not anticipate that the invitation would be accepted.

"Thank you, yes, if you will permit me to sit there on the piazza, for I have something to ask you."

He saw that she was pale, in spite of the exercise of her ride, and replied:

"Certainly, Miss Yancey, do just as you please, and in any way that I can serve you, command me."

"You are most good, Mr. Moore, and I felt that you would be, and hence I came."

She allowed him to aid her to alight, and escort her up to a seat upon the piazza, while Chips held her horse.

A servant was called and brought a glass of sherry, which Yesula seemed really to need, for she was evidently under a spell of some kind.

"Mr. Moore," she began, when the servant had departed: "Don't misjudge me in anything, nor deem me bold in seeking you here in your home."

"I have only the highest respect and admiration for you, Miss Yancey, so pray do not dread that I could misjudge your slightest motive."

"I thank you, and I will trust you."

"Do so without fear of a betrayal of your confidence."

She thanked him by offering her hand, which he lightly pressed, and then said:

"Mr. Moore, I have come to plead with you to go out to the frontier, to, in fact, go and search for Captain Delmont," and she fairly jerked the words out.

He gazed at her attentively a moment and then replied:

"It is my belief, Miss Yancey, that he is dead."

"Alas, I fear it; but it is not certain."

"No, it is not certain."

"And while there is life there is hope."

"True."

"He was believed to be killed, but not seen, and the bodies of those who were, so said Captain Van Dorn's letter, for I heard it all, to the end, were not found by the troopers."

"No, they were doubtless carried off by the Indians."

"And, if alive, Captain Delmont would also be carried off."

"Without doubt."

"Now he may be alive, and a prisoner, and he may be wounded and a prisoner, while yet he may be dead."

"But I ask you relieve my suspense and find out for me all there is to be known."

"I will have to go West to do so."

"True, Mr. Moore, but it will be a break in your life, and, pardon me, serve to take you out of your great grief that you now feel for poor Beatrice."

"Besides, you are the heir of Captain Delmont, and certainly wish to know whether he be dead or no."

"You certainly plead well, Miss Yancey."

"And you will heed my pleading, for remember, I am but a woman, pleading to save one, if not dead, to whom I owe my life, to whom my father owes his life, for Captain Delmont was

vented Brent Hastings from killing him, as he would have done had he fought a duel with him.

"It is a woman pleading, Mr. Moore."

"And I obey your wish, Miss Yancey."

"You will do this for me?"

"With pleasure to thus serve you."

"God bless you!" and she grasped his hand in her impulsive way and, ere he could prevent, touched her lips to it.

He started to his feet, his pale face flushing, and his lips parted, as though about to speak words called up by her act; but he checked himself and was instantly again the calm, courtly man.

"Miss Yancey, I will start to-night for the frontier, and I will allow you, while I am away, to open any letter that may come from Captain Van Dorn, so as to relieve your anxiety."

"Here is his letter, so you will know the writing, and my servant shall carry my mail by River Glade for you to look over."

"I will write you, if you will permit me that honor, the moment I learn aught regarding Captain Delmont, and Heaven grant it be only good news."

The tears came into her beautiful eyes, and she replied:

"You are so good to me, Mr. Moore, and I only hope you will understand me."

"To me Captain Delmont was only a friend, whom I several times met; but in my heart he holds the place as the preserver of my life, and I long to serve him, be he yet alive, and you can do more, by going, than all others can, I somehow feel."

"I thank you."

"By his death you become master here, and yet I feel that you would risk your life to save him from death."

"Again I thank you, Miss Yancey."

"Yesterday, by my fainting, I fear I allowed both you and my father to think that I loved Captain Delmont—you see I speak frankly—but yet I do not, though the thought that he was dead, or dying, he to whom I owed so much, completely overcame me."

"I can well understand it, Miss Yancey, for, proud though you may be, you have a most sympathetic heart, and glad am I to feel that you trust me, and allow me to be your friend."

"I do trust you."

"Did I not would I have come to you now?"

"No."

"Then believe me, and more, you must be careful to run into no danger yourself."

"I thank you that you have yielded to my pleading, and will now bid you good-by."

"I thank you that you reminded me of a duty I owe to poor Dudley Delmont, for it is just what I should have done."

She rose now and he aided her to her saddle, when, with a farewell grasp of the hand, she rode swiftly away, followed by Chips, who had to beat a tattoo with his heels upon the ribs of his pony to make him keep up.

Two hours after her departure Aubrey Moore left The Retreat, and driving to the landing, caught the boat up to Washington.

He had gone to keep his promise.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### TWO LETTERS.

SEVERAL weeks after the departure of Aubrey Moore for the frontier, the negro mail-carrier, who was wont to go after the letters for The Retreat, went by River Glade as was his wont, and handed the pouch to Yesula to overlook.

She had done the same several times before, and noticed that Aubrey Moore got quite a number of letters, his correspondence seeming quite extensive.

There was a foreign letter this day, and the post-mark was Vera Cruz, she noticed.

Then there were several letters in feminine hands, and one which she hastily seized, for she recognized the bold writing of Captain Van Dorn.

Then, too, there was the official envelope to prove it, and so she gave the pouch back to the negro, and kept the letter that came from the army captain, stationed at the frontier fort.

Breaking the seal, she read as follows:

"MR. AUBREY MOORE:—

"MY DEAR SIR:—I regret to communicate that all discoveries made by our scouts point to the fact of Captain Delmont's death the day he was ambushed by the Indians in the canyon."

"We have had our best scouts on the trail, and they can only find out that the red skins carried the dead soldiers and Captain Delmont away from the canyon with them along with the rown slain, for it is believed that the captain killed several Indians before he fell."

"There was a deep and rapidly-flowing stream in the mountains on their way to their village, and, as they halted here, it is believed that they threw the bodies into this river and thence they were swept away."

"The fact that Captain Delmont's hat, stained with blood and with a bullet-hole through the crown, was found here at the river camp of the Indians by one of the scouts seems further proof of his death."

"I have tried to communicate with the red-skins, but they fight shy and will give us no information,

"In a few days we will have a large body of troops arrive here, and then it is the intention of the general to at once march upon the Indian village, and by capturing it we can ascertain the exact truth, when I will at once notify you."

"Upon our return from the raid, if it is ascertained that Captain Delmont is certainly dead, then I will start his negro servant home to you."

"I have the honor to be,

"Obediently yours,

"DUKE VAN DORN."

Twice did Yesula Yancey read this letter through, her face pale and her lips quivering.

Whether or not she had spoken the truth, when she told Aubrey Moore that she was not in love with Dudley Delmont, she certainly showed deep emotion at the thought of his death, and the suspense she was kept in.

"I cannot believe that he is dead."

"No, it cannot be," she said to herself, and then she arose and sought her father with the letter, for she had confessed to him how she had urged Aubrey Moore to go to the frontier to learn the truth.

The judge seemed to be at first provoked at her bold act; but seeing how distressed she was, readily forgave her and said that he was glad that she had done as she did.

This second letter from Captain Van Dorn the judge read over carefully and then said:

"There is yet a hope, though a slim one, my child."

"Yes, father, and I cling to that hope, slender as is the thread that upholds it," she said, firmly.

"Heaven grant he yet lives, my child, for I feel now how deeply you are interested in the brave fellow."

"Well, sir, Mr. Moore will find out the truth, for I have perfect confidence in his power to do so."

"He is a remarkable man, father."

"Yes, and it is a pity to see him cut off in his youth thus, for he was in a rapid way to promotion to the majority of his regiment, the papers said."

"I referred to Mr. Moore, father."

"Oh, yes; he, too, is a remarkable man; but I do not think I quite understand him, Yesula, as I did poor Delmont."

"I do, sir."

The judge seemed a little surprised at this knowledge possessed by his daughter, but said nothing, and Yesula went off alone to commune with her thoughts.

Two weeks after Chips brought a letter from the country post-office, which was addressed to Yesula.

She did not remember to have seen the writing before, but saw that it was post-marked at the fort on the frontier, and knew that it came from Aubrey Moore.

Chips was hastily dismissed and the seal broken.

It was dated at the fort, and read:

"MY DEAR MISS YANCEY:—

"The heading will show you that I am at Fort —, and I only wish that I had good tidings to communicate to you; but I have not."

"To-day I returned from a march against the Sioux village, having gone as the guest of Captain Duke Van Dorn, whose letter to me you have doubtless received."

"We had a large force and pushed rapidly up into the Indian country, attacking the village of Yellow Jacket, the Renegade, who is a white man and chief of the tribe, just at nightfall."

"We captured the village, with many women and children, and a few braves, but the greater force of warriors escaped us."

"Still, from the prisoners, who were closely questioned through interpreters, we could learn nothing of a white captive being or having been in the camp."

"They remembered the attack upon Captain Delmont and his party, but said that the slain soldiers were tossed into the river which swept them away."

"The sword and pistols of Captain Delmont were found in the village, and so there is not a ray of hope now that our poor friend can be living."

"Beyond all doubt he is dead, and not one of the soldiers but believes so, and King has at last given up hope and returns with me when I leave next week."

"With deep regret at giving you pain and sympathy for you, as I too feel deeply the loss of our noble friend, believe me,

"With sincere regard,

"AUBREY MOORE."

A low moan escaped the lips of Yesula as she read the last line, and then she murmured in a plaintive voice:

"The thread is severed, the last hope falls, and I feel that he is dead."

Just then her father entered and she handed him the letter in silence.

"Poor fellow!" he said moodily.

"How strange that the same cruel destiny should have dogged him too."

"What same cruel destiny, father?"

"You remember the story he told us of the Red Diamonds?"

"Ah, yes, that fatal necklace!"

"He was the last possessor of it."

"Yes; and he is dead, and now it goes to Aubrey Moore."

"And he is the master of The Retreat by Captain Delmont's death."

"Yes, my child, Aubrey Moore is the lord and master of The Retreat, and the present owner of that haunted legacy, the Red Diamonds," and the

tone and manner of the judge, Yesula noticed, even in her sorrow, was most significant; but she did not then understand the meaning of his words.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE PORTRAIT.

AUBREY MOORE had returned from his trip out to the frontier, and he had told Judge Yancey and Yesula all that had occurred there, and which left no hope in the hearts of the three that Dudley Delmont could be alive.

King, Dudley's valet, had returned with Aubrey Moore, and a few days after their arrival, Yesula was surprised, as she sat sketching in the glade, to see the negro appear before her.

Though she had longed to do so, Yesula had not asked Aubrey Moore about the portrait which she knew Dudley Delmont had painted of her, and had in his possession.

That Aubrey had found it, if he had overlooked the belongings of Dudley Delmont, she felt assured; but she would bide her time and some day ask him about it, if he did not speak to her upon the subject.

The maiden seemed in a strange mood, after the return of the man who had so promptly obeyed her bidding, and she seemed hardly able to understand herself.

She was anxious to be alone, and devoted more time than usual to her sketching and horseback rides.

On the latter Chips was her constant attendant, but she had broken loose from having him as a protector from snakes when she went sketching, and told him to remain behind at the house.

When King suddenly appeared before her, as she sat before her easel, she slightly started, but at once spoke pleasantly to him when she recognized him as the faithful valet of Dudley Delmont.

She at first supposed that he had driven over as the attendant of Aubrey Moore, and had come to search for her; but she had been anxious to have a talk with the negro alone and find out all that he could tell of the death of his master.

It seemed that good fortune had given her the opportunity, and she said:

"I am glad to see you back again in safety, King; but it was most sad that your master was doomed to die."

"Yas, missy, it is sad, but somehow I can't think massa's dead, though all the officers at the fort and Massa Moore think so."

"Have you any reason for your hope that he is yet alive?" quickly asked Yesula, for in her heart also there was a lingering hope that the young officer lived.

"No, missy; only my feelings that he isn't dead."

"And so I have felt and hoped, King; but is Mr. Moore up at the house?"

"No, missy; I came alone."

"I wanted to see you, King, to ask you all about the attack on you and just what you saw that day."

"I'm awful glad to tell you, missy, for I came over to see you, as I has a letter for you."

"A letter for me, King?" asked Yesula, with surprise.

"Yes, missy; and it's one massa told me to give you if anything should happen to him."

Yesula turned pale, but asked, quietly:

"Where is the letter, King?"

"Here, missy."

And the faithful negro took from his pocket a letter and handed it to Yesula.

It was addressed simply:

"MISS YESULA YANCEY,

"River Glade Plantation."

She did not break the seal, but asked:

"When did you get this letter, King?"

"Massa gave it to me the day we left the station for the fort, and said:

"King, if anything happens to me you are to give this letter to Miss Yesula Yancey, of River Glade, and in my trunk you will find a large package addressed to her, which no one else is to see, and you are to give it also to her."

"A package, King?"

"Yes, missy; and I has it in the spring-wagon up to the house."

"Does Mr. Moore know of this?"

"No, indeed, missy; for massa's trunk was at the station when we started for the fort, and I kept the keys."

"When we got there, on our way back Mr. Moore and me, I watched the trunk mighty close, and on getting home I took out of it the package for you and hid it away until I got a chance to come over to-day and bring it to you."

"You are a good, faithful fellow, King, and I won't forget you."

"Lor', missy, I is only sarvin' my poor dead massa."

"It might have been all right to give the letter and package to Massa Moore to bring you, but Massa Dudley didn't say so, and so I wouldn't do it, nor tell him a word about it."

"You did right, King, and I wish you to now tell me all you know of that fight with the In-

dians, and then I will go up to the house and get that package you spoke of."

King gave a correct account of the ambush in the valley, as he saw it, and told how bravely Dudley Delmont had fought to rescue the guide, but all in vain.

He further said that the young officer had appeared silent and almost moody upon his trip to the fort, adding:

"I does believe, missy, that poor Massa Dudley felt the shadow o' death upon him, though I hopes he ain't dead."

"And so do I, King; but I thank you for all that you have told me, and will now go to the house."

She gathered up her traps and walked on toward the mansion, King following.

From the little spring wagon, in which he had come in, driving by from the little village, where Aubrey Moore had sent him on a message, he took the package and gave it to Yesula.

In return, he received from her a twenty-dollar gold-piece which made his eyes glisten, though he said:

"I doesn't want pay, missy, for serving my poor massa."

"Take it for serving me, King."

"I insist upon it," and Yesula took the package and sought her room.

Through some feminine impulse which it would be hard to understand, she first opened the package, when once she was in the privacy of her own room and had locked the door, while the letter lay with seal unbroken upon the table.

It was a package some two feet in length by eighteen inches in width, and half a foot in thickness.

Well wrapped up, it took her some time to discover what it was.

First a frame presented itself, and across it were silk velvet curtains, tied in place by silver cords.

Upon untying these and drawing aside the little curtains, a portrait was revealed.

"It is my portrait!" cried Yesula, starting to her feet, as she beheld the beautiful painting of herself, the secret work of the man to whom she owed her life, and whom she then believed to be dead.

#### CHAPTER XXVII.

##### FROM THE SPIRIT-LAND.

THE portrait revealed was a remarkable one, for not only was it a work of art, showing great talent in the artist, but the frame was also very beautiful, being carved out of various woods, upon each one of which had been painted a leaf belonging to the trees from which taken.

It was without doubt made by one who considered it a work of love, and the velvet curtains over the pictured face showed that it was not intended to be gazed upon by the public.

The portrait was a *fac-simile* in face to the miniature which Mrs. Jeffreys had of Yesula Yancey, and certainly a perfect likeness; but about the neck and shoulders a soft drapery, cloud-like in appearance, had been painted.

In tiny letters beneath were the words:

"My Ideal."

For a long time did Yesula Yancey gaze at this perfect likeness of herself, so exquisitely executed, and then, with a deep sigh she turned to the letter which she had placed upon the table before her.

Her hand trembled slightly as she took it up, and it was a moment before she gained courage to break the seal, for she said in a low tone:

"It seems like a communication to me from the Spirit Land, for he cannot be alive, and yet I strangely hope against all hope."

Breaking the seal, she saw that the letter was dated at The Retreat, and upon the night before Dudley Delmont had left home.

With strange feelings welling up from her heart she read what was written.

It was as follows:

"When you read these lines I will be dead, and hence I ask you to pardon all that may seem strange to you in what I say to one whom I hardly know, in one sense of the word."

"Long years ago as a little girl I saw you, and it came over me then that a shadow lay between us, one that could never drift away from your heart or mine."

"In late years I saw you again, and the shadow deepened because you were beyond my reach."

"Fate led me one day to be near you, when I was able to save your life, and yet I sought to hide my act from you because I wished not to have you feel under obligations to one whom you had been reared up to hate."

"That, when years ago I formed a boyish ideal, I felt that you had approached it when you came boldly to my home to thank me for the service I had rendered."

"For your sake I sought to prevent a duel between your father and Brent Hastings, for I knew that a feeling of revenge prompted the latter to show no mercy."

"I met you only to love you, and you will not think it so strange when I tell you that I have studied your face in its every feature, as the portrait I send herewith will affirm."

"Some time ago my lamented friend, Captain Bainbridge, saw a brother officer showing a miniature likeness of yourself, and which he said you had given to him."

"Captain Bainbridge loved you and knew to the contrary, though you had refused his love."

"He recognized the miniature as one you had given an intimate friend, an old schoolmate, and he demanded it of the officer, who, having purloined it from its place in the parlor of a hostess, gave it up."

"The miniature was shown me by Bainbridge, who told me the story of how he came to get it, and said that he meant to return it at an early date."

"But you remember his fate, and so the miniature fell into my hands."

"But I had already painted a likeness from it without my friend Bainbridge knowing it, for our quarters were together, and kept it as my ideal, for I knew the face at a glance."

"Back to Mrs. Jeffreys, your friend, I sent the miniature; but I kept the portrait, and now send it to you as a gift."

"I have kept its possession by me a secret. You may know that I wished no one to feel that it was the likeness of a real person, my ideal of womanhood."

"You have heard the story of a legacy in our family which seems to be a haunted one."

"I refer to the Red Diamonds, as we call the beautiful necklace which has been so fatal to the possessors of it."

"I am not superstitious, and yet how strange that the one from whose neck my father took the Red Diamonds died by her own hand, that my aunt, to whom they were given as a bridal gift, lost her life, that my mother died with them about her neck, my father, to whose possession they returned, died suddenly, and last, my sister, to whom I, defying superstition, gave them as a bridal present, went to her death that night of storm in the Potomac."

"With such a fateful record do you wonder that they are called the Red Diamonds?"

"With such fatality to the possessor, do you wonder that I prepare myself to meet death?"

"Though I riding superstition I yet feel a presentiment of evil, and so it is, before starting for my post on the frontier that I write you this letter, bequeathing to you, should I die, the knowledge of all that you are to me, and your portrait, which I have painted and have."

"And your portrait I hope to keep ever near me until the end, when it goes to you through safe hands, with this letter from one whose secret will be known to you only when he is in the grave."

"It will not harm you to know that I loved you, yet dared not tell my love on account of that shadow that had fallen between."

"Coming from me after I am dead, you will not censure, I know, but will sometimes think of me and at least honor my memory."

"For you I wish only joy and sunshine through life, and the hope that he who wins your heart may love you as devotedly as I have."

"DUDLEY DELMONT."

Such was the strange letter which Yesula Yancey read, and as she finished it, she dropped her head in her hands and moaned:

"Now I know that I really loved him; but it is too late! alas, too late!"

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

##### THE JEW AVENGER.

SOME weeks after the capture and supposed death of Dudley Delmont, a soldier going the rounds of the men on picket duty near the fort at which the young captain's regiment was stationed, saw a horseman coming toward him across the prairie.

The soldier was one whom the reader has met before, for it was Bainbridge, the sergeant who had, for a price, undertaken to kill Dudley Delmont, to carry out the plot of the Jew schemer to get rid of him.

Having a grudge against Captain Delmont, for some fancied injury, and willing to make the handsome sum offered him for blood-money, Sergeant Bainbridge had undertaken his work and so well carried it out that death followed, only Dudley Delmont was not the victim, but instead the brother of the assassin.

It will be remembered that where Captain Mortimer Bainbridge had won fame, and had lived a life of honor, his brother had gone to the bad, and only lately had reformed and become a soldier in his brother's regiment.

A dashing fellow, a superb soldier, he had risen to the rank of sergeant and was popular with all in the command, and Captain Bainbridge never let his past wild life be known among his comrades, but kept his secret and hoped that some day his brother would become all that he could wish him to be.

The sergeant dearly loved his younger brother, Mortimer Bainbridge, and when he was ordered to guard the body of the slain officer, supposed to be Dudley Delmont, he had fainted when he discovered the dread secret that he had made an appalling mistake.

His aim had been true, but the victim was his own brother.

At last the sergeant revived under the surgeon's care, and all pitied him for the shock he had received in his brother's death, for the dread secret was not suspected by any one.

For days did Sergeant Bainbridge appear like one in a dream.

He went about his duties unflinchingly, but spoke to no one unless from necessity, and each day was wont to visit the grave of his slain brother, and officers and men felt for his great grief.

At length he seemed to look with more resignation upon the death of his brother, and once more became like his former self, to outward appearance, though those who knew him

best felt that his manner was assumed and that the iron still entered deep into his soul.

When again presented to the reader, he is making his round of the outer line of pickets, and had halted on an eminence as he caught sight of a horseman coming along the trail toward him.

As the horseman drew nearer there broke from the soldier's lips the words:

"It is that accursed Jew! I have half a mind to kill him for all that he has made me suffer."

As the Jew drew near to him he seemed to recognize the soldier, for he said, pleasantly:

"Ah, mine fri'nt! It vas you, don't it?"

"I vas so glad."

His outstretched hand was unnoticed by the sergeant, who said, roughly:

"What brings you here, Jew?"

"I vas going to the fort, mine fri'nt, to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes, dot vas so."

"What do you want with me?"

"You did not do t'e works I paid you for, mine fri'nt."

"Curses on you! I more than did it, for the one I killed was my own brother," savagely said Bainbridge.

"Dot vas not my fault, mine fri'nt."

"It was, because you caused me to do it."

"It vas a vise child what vas knows his own papa, t'e Bible says; but you vas not wise enough to know your own brudder."

And the Jew laughed.

"He was mounted on Captain Delmont's horse, and the two looked strangely alike, while I expected the man you wanted killed along that trail just at that time."

"It was just nightfall, and I fired and killed; but, curse you, Jew, I took my brother's life."

"He was younger than I am, and I always loved him."

"He found me a few years ago in a mining-camp destitute and sick, and he took me to his quarters and cared for me."

"Then he urged me to enlist in his regiment and begin life anew, and I did so."

"But the old Adam was in me, and you selected me to do your red work, and look at the result!"

"I am tempted to kill you to avenge my poor brother!"

And the sergeant spoke fiercely.

"Don't you vas do it, mine fri'nt—kill yourselves," said the Jew, coolly.

Then he added:

"But I has coome for piziness."

"What business?"

"The captain vas yet alive."

"No; he was killed by the red-skins a few weeks ago."

"I haf heerd that, but I guess it vas not so."

"What do you know about it?"

"I vas hear talks."

"Well, he is dead, that is certain."

"I don't believe it."

"Because you are a fool but all others believe it."

"I wants you to kill him."

"I tell you he is dead."

"Vell, maybe; but if he vas not dead."

"Vill you do it?"

"Yes, for money."

"I vas pay you once."

"Yes; and for all the gold on earth I would not have done that deed, had I known whose life would be on my hands and conscience."

"If you want work done you will have to pay for it, for I need money to leave here to go elsewhere and escape the daily and nightly reminders of my sin."

"I vill gives you the same sum as pefore, mine fri'nt."

"Well, pay me that down, and add as much more when the deed is done, and I'll do it, for what is another life on my hands now?"

"But he may pe deat, and if he vas, I lose my monish."

"You must risk that, Jew."

"Vell, I pay you t'e monish, and v'en you vas kill him, if he don't vas deat now, write me von letters to that address, and I vill send you t'e palance," and the Jew handed the sergeant a card, upon which a name and address was written.

"All right; but what have you against Captain Delmont?"

"He vas my foe, and I wants him in t'e ground."

"Then I vas happy, yes so happy," and the face of the Jew showed commingled hatred and joy.

"All right, now for the money."

It was handed over to him, the Jew revealing quite a generous roll of bills while doing so.

Suddenly an idea seized upon the sergeant. No one was near, and Indians were known to be raiding in the vicinity of the fort.

The Jew had plenty of money, and money was his god.

He had sinned for it before, he had taken life for it, become a very Cain to get it, and the Jew's life would not rest heavily upon him, he thought.

He was anxious to get away from the fort,

and all that would remind him of his dead brother.

He had saved up his pay, and had it in the paymaster's hands, while he also had what the Jew had given him as blood-money.

What he could now get would give him a snug sum, and he could leave the army and go far away to drown his bitter memories.

All these thoughts flashed like lightning through the soldier's brain, and he at once determined to act.

The spot where they stood was secluded, and the nearest picket was a mile away.

He would not risk a shot, but, drawing his revolver quickly, he was bringing it down upon the head of the Jew, when his arm was seized in a vise-like grip, and a pistol-muzzle was thrust into his face.

"No, mine fri'nt, I vas not born in t'e voods to be scare by a owl."

"You makes mistakes."

"Curses!" came in a hiss from the lips of the thwarted soldier; but the Jew laughed and said:

"I vill not kills you, mine fri'nt, for I vants you to serve me, and kill t'e young captains for me."

"Now I vas see you, and pay you, I vas go pack v'ere I vas come."

"If t'e captains comes pack again, joost you kill him, and v'en I knows he vas deat, I sends you t'e more monish."

"Goot-by, sergeants," and wheeling his horse, the Jew rode slowly back by the trail he had come, leaving the soldier amazed at his having so quietly thwarted him and proven his master.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A STARTLING SURPRISE.

FOR a long time did Yesula Yancey debate with herself as to whether she should show the letter of Dudley Delmont to her father, along with the portrait.

At last she came to the conclusion to keep the secret to herself, and so the portrait was hidden away, the letter pinned to the velvet curtains which hung over the face.

She was glad to feel that the faithful King had kept the matter from Aubrey Moore, for it was something which she wished no one to know, and she felt assured that the negro was not aware of what the package contained which his master had sent to her.

So Yesula, with her double secret locked in her breast, that Dudley Delmont had loved her, and that she loved him, went about her duties and her pleasures as before.

Some days after the visit of King with the letter and portrait, Aubrey Moore rode up to River Glade Mansion.

He looked pale and wan, and both the father and daughter felt that he had suffered greatly and welcomed him warmly.

The judge liked the young man, who had come a stranger in their midst, and yet had, through the force of circumstances, become master of The Retreat estate and the large wealth pertaining thereto.

"He is handsome, very much of a gentleman, and certainly very rich, so why should he and Yesula not fancy each other in time?" said the judge to himself.

And with this thought in view, he was most warm in his invitation to Aubrey Moore to call often, in fact to run in on them at any time, for breakfast in his morning rides, or for dinner or supper.

With real sympathy for the young man, over whose life such a gloom had fallen, Yesula also urged him to come to River Glade when he pleased, and upon his departure he promised to do so.

The neighbors, in their kindness, called upon him to express their sympathy, while also in their hearts was a desire to get better acquainted with the new master of The Retreat, and indirectly congratulate him upon his good fortune.

He received such advances coldly, though with politeness, and seemed to enjoy going to visit River Glade more than anywhere else.

Perhaps it was the silent sympathy of Yesula, expressed in her actions toward him, that caused Aubrey Moore to feel that she was very dear to him, and becoming dearer.

It was not that he seemed to care less for his dead wife, or to have forgotten her memory and sad fate; but then, he was anxious to be often with Yesula, and she in turn was fond of his company.

The judge rubbed his hands complacently together, as he saw how matters were going, and remarked *sotto voce*:

"It is only a question of time."

Aubrey Moore was possessed of quite a musical talent, and his touch upon the piano was exquisite.

He sung well, too, and was a fine critic on art matters, so that Yesula found his criticisms of her work of real value to her.

He rode and drove well, and often the two went out together for a gallop on horseback or a drive, the judge often accompanying them.

Then Aubrey Moore had traveled extensively and told well what he had seen in other lands,

while his voice was low, musical, and fell pleasantly upon the ears of his listeners, be they men or women.

In referring, as he often did, to Beatrice, his lost bride, he spoke of her in a tone that gave Yesula to understand that she had been the one love of his life; but the worn look went from his face as time soothed his sorrow, and he would speak of Beatrice without the pain which at first every reference to her seemed to give him.

To please him, Yesula had gotten him to let her have a miniature likeness of Beatrice, and one day when he visited River Glade, as it had become his wont to do almost daily, she gave to him a beautiful portrait of the dead girl, which she had painted, with all her skill, for him, and had framed it most exquisitely.

He seemed deeply touched, and as he bent over her hand he kissed it, while he said:

"I once thought, Miss Yancey, that but one woman, one love could ever find place in my heart."

"How prone we are to be mistaken."

He said no more, and Yesula was glad that he did not.

She was becoming most deeply interested in this handsome, fascinating man.

He seemed to have gained an influence over her that seemed strange, for one of her strong nature.

But, had he breathed his love then, had he offered that love to her, within less than a short half-year after the tragic death of his wife, she would have felt differently toward him, and she was glad that he had not done so.

Still, his words came into her mind, and she wondered if she had forgotten Dudley Delmont.

Ah, no! his memory was still in her heart, and she could never forget him.

Yet she could not but feel that as time passed by and soothed her grief and that of Aubrey Moore, if he asked her to become his wife she would do so.

"Not as I loved, and could the more have loved Dudley Delmont, could I feel for Aubrey Moore," she had thought.

"But still he could become very dear to me, and I fear me is so now."

"I would rather he should be my brother, and yet I could not see him another's husband, feeling toward him as I do now."

"Oh, that Dudley could come back, and poor Beatrice!"

"Then could I see Aubrey Moore without a pang that Beatrice was his wife."

If you can understand her reasoning, fair reader, it is more than man can do; but then what man ever thoroughly understood a woman, and especially a beautiful woman?

The judge had his eyes open, and though not knowing the *motif* that governed either Aubrey Moore or his daughter, felt that they were becoming nearer and nearer to each other day by day.

"It must end as I predicted, and why not?" he said to himself.

One pleasant afternoon, some six months after the death of Beatrice, Aubrey Moore drove down to River Glade to ask the judge and Yesula to drive with him behind a handsome pair of bays which he had bought.

The animals were beauties, the vehicle a most comfortable one, and the invitation was accepted with pleasure by both father and daughter.

The judge had the back seat all to himself, while Yesula mounted with Aubrey Moore, to see how the bays acquitted themselves.

Along the river-road they sped at a swift gait, the beautiful scenery, in spite of being often seen, charming the beholders, while the horses won much praise from both Yesula and the judge.

"There goes the steamboat, and she appears to have just put into the ferry landing," said the judge, and he pointed to the Potomac steamer just making her way out from the Virginia shore.

"Yes, sir, she has landed some one at the ferry," replied Aubrey Moore.

"Perhaps some planter, whose vehicle may not have come to meet him, so you can give him a lift, Moore, as you have a spare seat here," the judge remarked.

"I was just thinking of the same thing, sir, so we will drive on and see if any one has landed, as it means a walk home from there, if no conveyance has been directed to meet him."

So saying Aubrey Moore drove swiftly on, reached the road leading down to the ferry and turned into it.

As they approached the cabin, where another ferryman had taken the place of Black Ben, they beheld two persons talking together.

One was Joe, the negro ferryman, and as the eyes of the three fell upon the other, a loud cry broke from the lips of Yesula Yancey, while Aubrey Moore almost shouted the words:

"My God! it is Dudley Delmont!"

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A RENEGADE FRIEND.

Now that it has been seen that the small ray of hope held by Yesula Yancey was realized,

that Dudley Delmont had not been killed, it will be well to account for his unexpected appearance at the ferryman's cabin that afternoon when Aubrey Moore took the judge and his daughter to drive behind his fine new team of bays.

It will be remembered by the reader that Yellow Jacket, as the red-skins called their white chief, was a deserter from Dudley Delmont's company, and had always been a hard character.

He had given trouble in the regiment time and again, and only the fact that he was a most daring soldier, and when on duty never shirked nor disobeyed his officers, had kept him from the severest punishment.

A man naturally had cannot live the life of an honest man long without showing the cloven foot, and so it was with Dick Darke.

He went beyond all bounds one day, and deserted to save himself.

He fled to the Indian camps as his only safeguard, and became a chief among them.

His knowledge of the movements of the pale-faces, and of the forts and soldiers, made him invaluable as a leader to the red-skins, and he was wont often to catch wagon-trains unguarded, or small parties of soldiers, and the result was always in favor of the renegade and his warrior band.

It was while lying in wait on the trail for the small party accompanying Captain Delmont, that he suddenly found in his prisoner one who had been his friend in the past.

Dudley Delmont therefore owed the fact of his safety to his having well treated the deserter, when he was a soldier under him.

Wounded badly as he was, the young officer felt that his chances of life were slim, and across his mind swept the thought that his end was near, and that the Red Diamonds had again proven their power of fatality to their possessor.

But Dudley Delmont was too sorely wounded to think of much, and was borne by the Indians further up into the hills.

With his own band of warriors, Yellow Jacket knew that he was all-powerful; but there were rival chiefs in the tribe, and they would not tolerate his carrying to their village a pale-face whom he meant not to torture to death.

Then, too, the young officer was well known to the red-skins as one who had been their bitter foe, and to get his scalp was what they would wish above all things.

For this reason Yellow Jacket determined to take Dudley Delmont to a secluded cabin, where, as a deserter, before he sought the red-skin camps, he had dwelt for several months.

He knew that there the wounded man would be safe, for neither white nor red-skin penetrated into those fastnesses.

Then, he was aware that Dudley Delmont was too severely wounded to stand a long trip.

So to the cabin in the mountains Yellow Jacket went, leaving his band encamped a few miles away, while he, with the four who carried the officer, started on foot for the secluded retreat.

The cabin had been built by the renegade and was by no means uncomfortable and was quickly made more so.

There was a spring of delicious water near, a quantity of dried buffalo-meat and game, and in fact it was the very place where one could securely hide away.

Skilled in caring for wounds, for he had been at one time a hospital steward, Dick Darke carefully examined the young officer and saw that the chances were more in favor of death than of recovery.

He extracted a bullet in the side as well as he could and carefully dressed other wounds.

Then he set two of the braves, who were young medicine-men, to care for the wounded man, while he, with his band, whom he had commanded not to speak of the prisoner, went on their way to their village.

Two days after they departed upon a raiding expedition, and a settlement was the sufferer, for he pillaged right and left, while men women and children fell under his merciless fury.

But in this raid the renegade had other motives in view than simply a merciless attack upon the settlement.

He had not believed that his band could raid into that thickly-settled district, and so had never before attempted it; but he wished medicines and stores for the wounded man in the lonely cabin, and he got them.

Having made a brilliant dash—and a deadly one—he had selected from among the stores all that he wished, and when beyond danger of pursuit had put on a pack-horse the things he intended for Dudley Delmont's comfort.

Loaded down with booty and rejoicing in a number of scalps taken, the warriors were sent on to the village, with orders to say that he would soon follow.

Keeping two braves with him, he went on to the little cabin, and it was with a dread that death had anticipated him that he approached it.

But the two red-skin nurses met him at the door and told him the wounded pale-face yet lived.

He found Dudley Delmont hovering between life and death, and unconscious from high fever.

But what he had brought with him made him really comfortable, and the medicines helped him greatly.

For several days did the renegade remain, caring for the wounded soldier, and then he noted a change for the better, for the fever was breaking.

Instructing the two red-skin nurses just what to do, and how to give the medicines, he started for his village, to find himself more powerful than ever with the tribe, for the booty had been recovered with great rejoicing, and the Indians were happy over the scalps taken on the raid.

His braves, true as steel to him, had not betrayed his secret, and so, after a few days in the village, he went back to the cabin, a night's ride distant.

Dudley Delmont was better—yet still it was a struggle between life and death, with the chances in favor of the latter.

Nearly a week did the white chief remain by the side of the man he was befriending, and then he saw that the chances were changing and hope entered his heart that the gallant officer would live.

Thus the time went by, the renegade visiting the wounded soldier at the little cabin, whenever he could, and his secret being still kept by his braves, while the two who cared for Dudley Delmont were as devoted as ever in their nursing, influenced more by promises made them by Yellow Jacket, than through any humanity for the pale-face, whom, if they had had their way, they would have scalped with real delight long before.

But they loved their chief, admired him, feared him and more, his promises to pay them well, altogether made them very attentive nurses, and they seemed tireless ones.

Then came the raid of the soldiers upon the Indian village, the night surprise of the dashing regiment to which Dudley Delmont belonged, and his own gallant company struck a fierce blow for revenge.

With their warriors, several of the chiefs escaped and among them Yellow Jacket.

In their dismay, fury and hatred, the renegade formed the master spirit to control, and he was quickly made the leader, or head chief.

He formed order out of chaos, attacked the soldiers from ambush on their retreat from the mountains, dashed into their camps, and rescued many of the squaws and children, thereby gaining a stronger hold upon the red-skins who acknowledged him as their master.

It was in this raid of the soldiers that Aubrey Moore was, accompanying Captain Duke Van Dorn as his guest, and, as no trace of Dudley Delmont could be found in the Indian camp, and nothing heard regarding him, it was most naturally supposed that he had been killed on the day of the ambush in the canyon, and his body, with those of the others slain, thrown into the swiftly-flowing river.

But instead, in that secluded cabin, far from the scene of conflict, with two red-skin nurses, faithful only to their own interests, the wounded officer lay, slowly growing better and with the shadow of death that had rested upon him tinged with the silver lining of hope of recovery.

#### CHAPTER XXXI. BACK TO LIFE.

WHEN Yellow Jacket had reorganized the Indian village, and sought a stronger retreat for the camp, further in the mountains, he left his adopted people, as he said, for a scout down among the homes of the pale-faces.

He carried with him as an escort but a few warriors, and these he left encamped among the hills a few miles from the cabin where Dudley Delmont lay wounded, while he went on alone.

True to their own interests, the two braves were on the alert, and had proven, as before, faithful guardians of the wounded soldier.

Haggard, emaciated and very weak, Dudley Delmont lay upon the rude cot; but his wounds were healing, he had but slight fever, and his brain was clear.

Two days before, his senses had come back to him, and waking out of his delirium, he had come to realize his situation.

One of the red-skins spoke a little English, and the officer spoke some Sioux, so that they were enabled to understand each other perfectly, and Dudley Delmont discovered that for six weeks he had been lying in that cabin, hovering between life and death.

He was told that the Yellow Jacket had been his friend, and he muttered:

"If I live, I owe my life to Dick Darke, the deserter."

In hopes of receiving presents, the two Indians were most anxious to explain their devotion, and Dudley Delmont told them that he would not forget them, and, in fact, made them liberal promises to keep up their attendance upon him the more faithfully, for he understood Indian nature pretty well.

When, therefore, Yellow Jacket entered the cabin, he was greeted with a smile from the

young officer, who was, however, too weak to even raise his hand.

"I'm glad, Captain Delmont, to see you better, sir; but it was a close pull you've had with death," said the renegade, saluting politely and then taking the hand of the officer.

"Very close, but your good care outpulled death," was the feeble reply.

"I've but done my duty, and happened to have two young Indian medicine-men, who took care of you according to my way, and you'll pull through, sir."

"I believe so."

"You've been here six weeks, and delirious all the time with fever; but the wound in your side is all right now, and the others are healing."

"It will be a long time before I am myself again, Darke."

"Don't mind that, sir, for these red-skins will look after you well; but it will be months before you are able to travel, for I never saw a man closer to the grave than you were, and not go into it."

"I'll have a wicky-up built outside for you, which will be pleasanter than the cabin, and I'll bring you some things to nourish you on my way back, which will be in about a week."

"But where will you get them, Darke?"

"I'll get them, captain, you bet, for you shall not starve, and if they are stolen or a trifle blood-stained, they won't taste any the worse, sir," was the reply, which Dudley Delmont looked upon as a most significant one.

After a thorough dressing of the wounds of the officer Darke took his leave and went on his way.

He had heard from a Pawnee Indian who had been dwelling among the whites, and committing some crime had been forced to fly, that a country store had been lately established at a point between two valley settlements, and upon this he meant to make a raid.

Guided by the Pawnee he went by night to the spot, and his request, in English, for the storekeeper to get up and sell him some powder, did away with suspicion and the door was opened, when he gave his name as that of a settler, who he had learned dwelt in the settlement.

An ally of red-skins, a renegade from his own people, he was as merciless to the whites as were the Indians themselves, and so he felled the storekeeper with a blow that crashed in his skull, and in an instant held possession of the place.

The brother, a half-grown son and the wife of the poor trader fell under the attack of the Indians, and without a shot being fired, so that Yellow Jacket was in full possession, and with no fear of a surprise.

The horses of the trader were packed with the goods from the store, the man, with gratitude to Dudley Delmont the only redeeming part of his nature, loading one animal down wholly with things he meant for the wounded officer, and he selected the best of all for that purpose.

Then the red raiders took their departure, loaded down with booty, and were miles away from the settlement before their devilish work of the night was discovered.

Of course an alarm ran through the settlement, couriers were dispatched to the fort with the news, and by noon a large force started in pursuit.

But, once in the mountains, the little band defied pursuit, and, as is generally the case, the troops dared not follow the Indians into their fastnesses, and so the trail came to an end, whereas, if three times the force had gone, a fearful blow might have been struck in retaliation.

The little band was sent on with its loot to the village, while Yellow Jacket went by the lone cabin, leading his pack-horse.

"I have all you need here, Captain Delmont," said the renegade, as he approached the officer, who was lying in a snug little wicky-up which the red-skins had built for him.

"Ah, Darke, you have been on a raid," sadly said the officer.

"Only way I could get what I wanted, sir, and you know I am at war with my race now, so all I do is against them."

And the man laughed bitterly.

"And yet, in contradiction to your words, you have treated me with a kindness I could not expect of a brother."

"Captain Delmont, you saved my neck from the hangman's noose and once saved me from having the lash laid upon my bare back."

"Again, when I was wounded in battle and left on the field, you risked your life, came back and bore me off, when, if I had been taken by the red-skins then, you know the awful fate I would have had to suffer."

"No; I am but trying to pay the debts I owe you, and let me do it in my own way, while you are at liberty, as soon as you leave here, to hunt me down as a renegade and have me hanged."

"You do not intend to hold me as a prisoner then?" asked Dudley Delmont, with a smile.

"Oh, no, sir; for I have kept the secret of your presence here from all but my own braves, and but six of them know where this cabin is."

"When you are able to ride, I will come for you with a good horse and guide you to a point from where you can make your way to the fort; but that will be a couple of months yet, for you are as weak as a child."

And the renegade again left the young officer to the care of his red-skin nurses.

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### A LIFE-DEBT REPAID.

THE days dragged their weary length along to Dudley Delmont, in his lone retreat among the mountains, and slowly and surely he gained strength.

Among the things which the thoughtfulness of the renegade had brought him, were a number of books, taken in various Indian raids, and which the red-skins regarded with almost sacred feelings, putting them away in the council tepee.

But Yellow Jacket held no such ideas of sacredness, and taking the books made them do good service for the officer in his dreary life in the little cabin.

At last he grew well enough to dismiss his two nurses, and being well supplied with funds, Dudley Delmont paid them most liberally for their services, and they went off well pleased, while, claiming to have been captives to the pale-faces, they returned to their village saying that they had escaped and at once became heroes.

But Dick Darke kept up his visits to the young officer, and on one of these said:

"It has been nearly four months now, captain, since you came here, and next time I come I will bring you a horse and guide you to the main trail, for I think you will be well enough to go then."

"I feel well enough now, Darke, but am not as strong as I would wish; but a week will still further help me," was the reply.

The young soldier walked with the renegade, when he took his departure, for quite a distance along the trail, and until Darke told him not to tire himself, when he turned back, while Yellow Jacket mounted his horse and rode on to his village.

Taking a different way back, as he did not feel in the least degree fatigued, Dudley Delmont came to a halt at the head of a small canyon.

He saw that he could go no further in that direction, but would have to retrace his steps the way he had come, and so he sat down to rest before doing so.

As he sat there his eyes suddenly fell upon an object that glittered in the head of the canyon.

He rose and took a closer survey.

In wet weather the canyon was evidently the bed of a stream, and the waters came tumbling down over a cliff forty feet in height.

In the bowl thus made by the falling waters were a number of glittering objects, and one of these it was that had attracted the attention of the young soldier.

A hasty examination proved to him that it was gold, and he saw that a considerable quantity had been deposited there.

Taking some of the find with him, he went on to his cabin and there examined them more minutely.

"It is a fair find, but I do not think will pan out a very large fortune."

"Still I am in luck, doubly so, for I have gotten well from my desperate wounds and found gold besides, for I am sure the place is not known to Darke or the Indians."

"Can it be that the luck of the Red Diamond's has changed from bad to good?" and he smiled grimly as he uttered the words regarding the fateful jewels.

The next day he visited the little canyon and staked it out as his find, determining at some future time to come and see if it was worth the working.

A week after Dick Darke put in an appearance, leading a pony which was gentle and an easy rider.

The bridle and saddle of the officer were placed upon the animal, and the two mounted and rode away from the spot where for four long months Dudley Delmont had lived and suffered.

It was nightfall when the trail was reached, where the renegade was to bid the young officer good-by, and he said simply:

"That trail, Captain Delmont, will carry you to the Fair Farms settlement, and it is just about thirty miles away, and from there you will know the way to the fort."

"Good-by, sir."

He saluted politely, but Dudley Delmont grasped his hand and said:

"Darke, I owe you my life, and if ever it is in my power to serve you I will."

"But, my man, take my advice and give up being a renegade."

"Seek other scenes where you are not known, and enter upon a new career, for, if you remain here, sooner or later the rope-end will be your fate."

"I thank you, captain, for your good advice; but it's too late for me to change now."

"Good-by, sir, and good fortune to you."

Thus they parted, and Dudley Delmont rode on his way alone.

It was his intention to camp soon, for he was fatigued by his long ride; but in crossing a small prairie, he suddenly ran upon a party of horsemen whom he knew to be red-skins.

Instantly he wheeled in flight, and they, discovering him, started in hot pursuit.

But the animal which the renegade had given him was very fleet, and not only held his own, but slowly gained.

After several hours' run the officer eluded his pursuers, who gave up the chase and hurried off toward their own country.

But Dudley Delmont had exerted himself beyond his strength, and every bone in his body ached, while a fever seemed to be creeping upon him.

He realized his danger, and rode toward the cabin of a settler which he remembered was only a few miles distant, and arrived there in a condition utterly helpless.

Most kindly was he welcomed by the settler, who was, however, not the one who had formerly dwelt there, and he was not recognized, consequently, as the officer who was supposed to be dead, while in fact he was dressed in buckskin, his uniform having long since worn out.

For long weeks he lay in the settler's cabin, most kindly treated by the man and his wife, and his life again hung by a thread.

But his strong constitution again conquered, and he one day awoke to a consciousness that he would live.

After four weeks' illness he was again able to push on his way to the fort, and the settler accompanied him as far as the settlement.

It was just nightfall when they reached the settlement, and Dudley Delmont beheld a crowd of excited men hastening toward a tree, about which others were piling up bundles of dry brush.

In the midst of a crowd was a prisoner, a man in the garb of a frontiersman, and they were hurrying him to the tree.

It took but a glance to recognize in that man, livid-faced and scared-looking, Dick Darke, the renegade.

He had ventured into the settlement, spying around, and recognized by some one, had been taken, and a crowd was quickly called together to punish him.

That punishment was to mete out to him the fate which his red-skin allies visited upon white captives, in fact, to put him to death by the most cruel torture.

He was to be burned to death, bound hand and foot to that tree about which ready hands were piling fagots.

Instantly Dudley Delmont dashed forward, and his voice rang out clear and stern:

"Men! I claim that man as a United States prisoner, and you are not to punish him yourselves."

Some laughed, others hooted at the thought of one man interfering, while the leader asked:

"Who are you, pard?"

"I am Dudley Delmont, captain in the —th Cavalry, now stationed at Fort —, and as a United States officer I demand you to give that prisoner into my keeping."

Some demurred, others said that Captain Delmont had been killed months before; but a few recognized him as in truth Dudley Delmont, and the prisoner was reluctantly given over to him, while a guard offered to conduct him on to the fort.

"No, bind him well, and I will be responsible for him," and, tired as he was, Dudley Delmont rode on his way, holding the rein of his prisoner's horse.

A few miles from the settlement the young officer came to a halt.

"Darke, five weeks ago you set me free, and I advised you to give up your evil life.

"Now I shall set you free, and I will cancel the debt I owe you.

"And more; I will again advise you to lead a different life, for I cannot but feel kindly toward you.

"To aid you in this I will tell you that I found traces of gold, several little pockets containing fair quantities, in the canyon north of the cabin in the mountains.

"Go there and get all you can, give up your alliance with the red-skins and seek to live a better life elsewhere.

"Now go!"

He released the renegade from his bonds, and with a heart full of gratitude Dick Darke went his way alone, while the young soldier continued on until he came to a camping-place where he sought the rest he so much needed, as he had not gained his former strength, by any means.

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

##### THE RETURN.

WHEN Yesula Yancey saw Dudley Delmont and knew that she could not be deceived, the cry that broke from her lips was one that showed both joy and utter amazement.

There certainly could be no mistaking the tall, elegant form of the young soldier, as he stood there by the cabin of the negro ferryman.

Aubrey Moore had been little less startled

than Yesula, while the judge, in his surprise, had uttered something strangely like profanity.

Almost upon their haunches Aubrey Moore had pulled the horses when he saw one before him who he had been certain was dead.

But instantly he had regained his control, and driving quickly forward drew rein by the cabin-door.

Springing from the carriage Aubrey Moore grasped the hand of his friend and wrung it warmly, while he said in a voice that trembled with deep emotion:

"Dudley Delmont, can this really be you, back from the grave?"

There was no mistaking the tall form and handsome face; but the features seemed drawn from long suffering and the eyes were sunken.

The face was haggard and wore a look of sternness seldom seen there, and the young officer was not his usual weight by many pounds.

But he smiled pleasantly and said:

"I do not wonder that you deemed me dead, Aubrey, for I have frightened many people, who believed they saw my ghost.

"But I am alive, flesh and blood as you see, and glad to be home again; but let me not forget the judge and Miss Yancey, whom you have with you, I see."

The judge had already alighted from the carriage, and now shook hands warmly with the returned soldier, while Yesula, after her first moment of excitement was over, had turned pale and sat still, waiting for Dudley to approach her.

This he did at once, though with a certain feeling of restraint, which she could not but notice, and which she felt herself.

"Let me tell you, Captain Delmont, how glad I am to welcome you from the grave, as it were," she said, softly.

"I thank you, Miss Yancey, and strangely near the grave I was, I assure you," he answered.

Then Aubrey told him how he had been driving a new pair of horses, and approaching the ferry, had noticed the steamboat, and had hoped to give some one a seat home.

"How little I dreamed that some one was you, Dudley; but come, you look tired, so take a seat in the carriage, and we will drive at once to The Retreat, for I know the judge and Miss Yancey will honor us with their company to supper, if it is a bachelor's hall."

"I will gladly accept, if Captain Delmont will tell us how it is that we find him alive, when we have mourned him dead for six months," said Yesula.

"I am glad to feel that I have at least been mourned; but I will tell you the story with pleasure, if you will come to The Retreat," said Dudley Delmont.

The judge had never visited The Retreat, since when a young man he had been on intimate terms with Dudley's father and uncle, the latter having been the one he had killed in a duel.

But he at once yielded to the invitation, and said:

"It will give me pleasure to go, Captain Delmont, and as I rode on the back seat, so did not see how Moore's horses acquitted themselves, I will resign my place to you and take Yesula's seat in front."

"Yes, judge, I was just going to suggest that," Aubrey Moore said, quickly, and he added:

"Take good care of Dudley, Miss Yancey, for he looks fagged out."

"I am," was the reply, and all having taken their seats the carriage rolled away toward The Retreat, Aubrey Moore handling the reins in masterly style and sending the fleet bays along at a clipping pace.

As they reached the mansion King spied them, and his howl of mingled joy and terror, as he recognized his master, could have been heard half a mile.

He seized his master by both hands and the tears rolled down his cheeks as he gazed at him, while he said eagerly:

"Massa, you told us to go, sah, or I'd never have left you, and when I looked back and saw you trying to save the scout, I knew you would be kilt, sah, but we c'dn't do nothing then."

"Ah, Massa Dudley, but I is glad to see you, sah."

"I never blamed you, or the soldiers, King, for it could not have been helped, and you would only have been slain had you attempted to rescue me," replied Dudley, deeply touched at the welcome of the faithful negro, who had been his comrade as well as his servant.

Knowing well that Judge Yancey had never entered The Retreat mansion since the day of his quarrel with his uncle, Dudley Delmont did all in his power to keep that painful memory from being recalled, and led his guests into the library, while he told the old negress who acted as housekeeper and was laughing and crying together at his return, to conduct Miss Yancey to her room, while he himself did the honors for the judge, remarking:

"I suppose all is as it was in the old home, Aubrey?"

"Yes, Dudley, I have made but one change, and that is to send the Red Diamonds away."

"You have not sold them, I hope?" quickly said Dudley.

"Ah, no! only sent them to the bank for safe keeping in the vault, for candidly I got to be afraid of them after your supposed death."

"And I on the contrary, now look upon them as gems of good omen, now that their cruel fatality failed upon me."

"I shall keep them and test their power for good or evil most thoroughly," responded Dudley Delmont firmly.

"Heaven grant that their power prove for good, Dudley, for whether they brought evil or not, we have had enough of misfortune since those of your name have owned the Red Diamonds," and Aubrey Moore spoke with an impressiveness which Dudley Delmont could not but feel.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### THE STORY.

THE Retreat had always been noted for its good cheer, and the sable cook who presided over the culinary department had not an equal, it was said, in the entire State of Virginia, so renowned in *ante bellum* days for its hospitality and fine living.

Delighted with the return of the master of the mansion and glad of the chance of "showing off" before Judge Yancey and his daughter, who was known to entertain most royally, the colored *chef* of The Retreat mansion determined to outdo himself in the meal that he prepared as a "welcome feast," as the butler called it.

"You has massa to welcome home, Jonah, and the judge ter welcome back to The Retreat, and it's many a long day, yas, long year, since Judge Yancey put his legs under ther Delmont mahogany," said the negro butler.

And Jonah agreed with him, so that if the meal, which was half-supper, half-dinner, was a little late, it was atoned for in its excellence.

The best wines were brought forth from the cellars, and a mint-julep, which Bonus, the butler, knew just how to mix, gave all an appetite.

The judge praised the cooking, the salad and the wines, and mentally remarked that his daughter must become mistress of that home, be it Dudley Delmont or Aubrey Moore that she married; but she must marry one of them.

"I guess Dudley won't give up his old home; but he might as well, as he is in the army and never here a tenth of his time; but whichever lives here Yesula must marry, and I'll come over and dine with them Wednesdays and Sundays."

So the judge decided, and Yesula herself could not but admire the grandeur of the old home and the superb serving of dinner, and yet no mistress there to preside over the mansion.

When the meal was over the judge urged Dudley Delmont to tell the story of his escape from death, and in this request Aubrey Moore and Yesula heartily joined.

He yet looked pale and worn, for he had not regained his strength yet; but under the influence of being at home and surrounded by those who cared for him he had brightened up considerably, and said:

"I am really anxious that you should know what a miraculous escape I had from death, and will gladly tell you what has happened to me."

He glanced at Yesula quickly as he spoke, and then added:

"I seemed to have a presentiment of evil.

"It crept over me from the day I returned from Washington to find my poor sister dead.

"In spite of my deriding superstition the Red Diamonds took a strong hold upon me, and I seemed to realize that their ownership was fatal.

"With such feelings, which I could not cry down at my will, I made all my arrangements as though I was on my dying bed," and again he cast that significant glance at Yesula.

The maiden saw it, but she showed no sign of doing so, and Dudley Delmont wondered if King had been able to carry out his instructions.

He wished that he had spoken to King, to ask him, before he began his recital.

Having come back to his home, he almost wished that the letter and portrait had not been delivered, for, what he had dared write as from the dead, was a pretty hard thing to face afterward.

He wondered what Yesula thought of him, and more, he wondered if aught existed between her and Aubrey Moore.

The latter certainly seemed more cheerful than when he had left him, and he appeared to be on intimate terms with the judge and his daughter.

Aubrey Moore was a very fascinating man, he knew, and he could not expect him to remain single, while he surely had not expected any love affair between Yesula and himself, in the few times they had met when he was last at home.

So he could not blame her, or Aubrey Moore, if they were interested in each other.

He would be very careful to find out, before he ventured on ground that might be forbidden to him.

All these thoughts chased each other rapidly through the brain of the young soldier, while he hesitated before beginning his story.

The thought that Yesula might love Aubrey Moore was a bitter blow to him; but he had suffered in the past and would in the future.

Then, in his quiet, interesting way he told the story as it had occurred, and how he would have been slain but for the recognition of him by Dick Darke, the renegade.

How badly he had been wounded, and yet how tenderly cared for he made known, and all wondered that he had ever survived those long weeks of delirium.

Then he told of the renegade guiding him to the trail leading to the fort, and there parting with him, with the chase that followed, his seeking the settler's cabin and the relapse which again very nearly cost him his life.

His leaving there and coming upon the Vigilantes with Dick Darke a prisoner, and their intended horrible punishment of him he made known, and how he had been caught while spying in the settlement to get posted to make another raid with his red band.

"Having released him, I repaid my debt to him," said Dudley Delmont, and then he continued:

"I then went on to the fort.

"I was weak from my suffering and sickness, so did not leave my solitary camp until late the next day.

"It was, therefore, after dark when I rode up to the sentinel at the fort and was challenged.

"I dismounted and advanced at his command, and, being dressed in buckskin, I suppose I did look a little odd, for when the Irish sentinel caught sight of me he gave a yell, threw away his gun and ran off shouting:

"The captain's ghost! the captain's ghost!"

"Had I had a force at my back I could then and there have taken the fort, for others who saw me also ran, until I came to the officer of the guard, and he greeted me in a manner that proved that he knew I was flesh and blood.

"I told my story to the general, and, I may as well tell you now, offered my resignation from the army, for I care no longer to remain in the service."

This seemed to be a surprise to all, and Dudley Delmont saw the face of Yesula flush and then pale.

But Aubrey Moore said quickly:

"I think you acted wisely, Dudley, for you are very rich, have this elegant home, and can afford to pass your days in luxury and contentment, while you certainly have won fame as a soldier."

"You are a good fellow, Aubrey, for my coming back to life, as it were, throws you out of my legacy; but it is just like you to forget self."

"I certainly have ample for myself, Dudley, and if you will let me live with you, at least until you are married, I will be just the same as master of The Retreat for the time, and that is more than I could ask," replied Aubrey Moore with a laugh which showed how little he cared for the fortune in comparison with the joy of Dudley's return.

His allusion to the marriage of the soldier seemed at random; but Dudley, remembering his letter to Yesula, blanched visibly, while she also colored up and looked down, not daring to meet the eyes of either of the young men just then.

"Your home is here, Aubrey, as long as you wish to make it so; but I resigned because my actions in releasing Dick Darke were criticised, and again I feel that it would take me quite a long time to fully recuperate my strength and I wished not to ask for a furlough.

"My resignation was approved by the general, who gave me leave until it was accepted, and I stopped in Washington and reported on my way here.

"Whether I will have my resignation refused, and be court-martialed for releasing Dick Darke, remains to be seen; but if dismissed for so doing, after what he did for me, I shall always feel that I but obeyed the impulse of my heart and did my duty."

"And so do I think, Captain Delmont," said Yesula earnestly, while Aubrey Moore remarked:

"No one can blame you for it, Dudley, that would put themselves in your place."

"It was justice, Captain Delmont, but not military law, and that is what you will be judged by," said Judge Yancey, and soon after the carriage was ordered and the guests departed, leaving the two young men together in the grand old home.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### AT HOME.

THE next morning Dudley Delmont slept late, though Aubrey was up early and had breakfast, leaving word that the young soldier was not to be disturbed.

The truth was that a reaction had set in, and Dudley Delmont not having regained his

strength, was almost prostrated, now that he had reached his home and could rest.

His wounds had been most severe, two of them of a nature to prove fatal to most men.

With care he would come round as strong as ever in time; but by overtaxing his strength he might break himself down for life.

His hardships West, long travel from the frontier, worry about being court-martialed, and also his dread after reaching home that something stood between Yesula Yancey and himself wrought upon him, and when at last he sunk to sleep in his own room he was utterly prostrated.

But he slept soundly for hours, and at last was awakened by the singing of the birds.

The sun shone brightly, the air was balmy and loaded with the perfume of flowers, and already he began to feel better for being in his own home.

He arose and threw open the blinds, and the view that met his gaze, though one he had gazed upon from boyhood, fairly enraptured him.

His room was in a wing of the mansion, and it looked down a valley leading to the Potomac which wound its way along several miles distant, though the broad acres of the Delmont estate ran to the very banks.

There were green fields in the distance in which slaves were at work, a pasture dotted with cattle, a winding stream flowing to the river and hill-lands covered with forests.

Situated as was the mansion upon a high hill the view was a grand one indeed, and for some time Dudley Delmont stood gazing out upon the scene.

Then he rung the bell for his valet, for a glance at his watch told him that it was nearly eleven o'clock.

"I have had a most refreshing sleep, King," he said, as his faithful valet entered.

"Yes, sah; and Massa Moore told me not to wake you up."

"It was kind of him; but he has had breakfast, of course?"

"Yes, sah, at eight o'clock; and he is off on the plantation somewhere, sah."

Dudley Delmont was silent for a few minutes while he dressed, and King eyed him closely, hoping he would have something to ask him, as to his carrying out his wishes.

At last Captain Delmont said:

"King!"

"Yes, massa."

"Do you remember some instructions that I gave you as to what should be done in case of my death?"

"Yes, sah, I recomembers."

"And you believed me dead?"

"Yes, sah, at last I did, and at first I did, but then there was times when I dreamed you was living, and so I didn't exactly know."

"But, believing me dead, did you do as I told you?"

"Yes, sah."

The face of the man flushed, and he asked again:

"I mean as to the letter and package?"

"Yes, sah, I tuk 'em myself to Miss 'Sula."

"Ah!"

This exclamation expressed a great deal, and after it Dudley was silent for a moment.

Then he said:

"Did Mr. Moore know of what you did?"

"No, sah, for I had the keys of your trunk, and so just tuk the letter and package out."

"That was right; and you then gave them to Miss Yancey?"

"Yes, sah, I watched my time, and drove by there when going on an errand for Massa Moore."

"Missy 'Sula were down in the park drawin' pictures, and I went there and told her I had a letter and a bundle for her which you said I was to give her in case you got kilt."

"Then she asked me all about you, and how it all happened, and said as how she had found Massa Moore so willin' to go out to the fort and see if you was really dead, when she begged him to do so."

"Ah! she asked him to go then?"

"Yes, sah, and he went and did all he could, I kin tell you, sah."

"I well know that, King; but Miss Yancey took the things?"

"Deed she did, sah, and the tears come into her lovely eyes, and her leetle mouth trembled just like a frightened bird."

Dudley turned his head away to hide what his face might reveal.

Then he said, in an indifferent tone:

"I never spoke to her about the things last night, so asked you; but tell me, King, how does Mr. Moore seem to like Miss Yancey?"

"Very much, sah, for he goes over to the Glade very often; but then I guesses he's lonesome; but he's an awful nice gemman, Massa Dudley, and treats us all ever so kind."

"But now I'll go and tell Bonus you are ready for breakfast."

Dudley Delmont followed King out of the room in a few moments, and going out upon the piazza, found Aubrey Moore there, who arose and warmly greeted him.

"King said you were riding on the plantation, Aubrey."

"I was, but returned half an hour ago."

"How refreshed you look, and I'll guarantee you are a new man within a few weeks; but come; your breakfast awaits, and I will go in with you, though I had mine at eight o'clock," and the two friends walked arm in arm into the breakfast-room, where Bonus, with the assistance of Jonah, had a meal prepared that would have tempted a monk to feast in the fasting season of Lent.

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

##### WHAT A TOMBSTONE REVEALED.

SEVERAL days passed away, after the arrival of Dudley Delmont at The Retreat, and he had seemed content only to loll about and lead a lazy life.

He had taken several short drives and walked about the grounds, but seemed content to rest in an easy-chair while Aubrey Moore and he talked together or the latter read to him.

He retired early and arose to eight o'clock breakfast, and, under the luxuries showered upon him, and the total freedom from care, he began to rapidly improve.

The memory of his father's sudden death and his sister's tragic end, of course preyed upon him, for he was a man of deep feeling; but then, they had passed away, and their memory alone remained, and he did not cloud his life by bitter memories.

Knowing that Yesula had received his letter and the portrait also worried him, for he knew not what would be the climax.

Of course, knowing of his love for her, she could but wait for him to speak.

Then he would know his fate.

But he could not get it out of his mind that Aubrey Moore loved Yesula devotedly, and that perhaps she had learned to love him.

That there was an understanding between them he feared, although he did not believe that Aubrey Moore would so soon forget his wife's memory as to wish to marry her before a year had gone by after poor Beatrice's death.

Another cause of worry to the young soldier, was the court-martial which he feared was pending over him.

As Judge Yancey had said, his act in releasing Dick Darke the renegade had been an act of justice, but not military law, and by the latter he would be tried.

He had sent in his resignation, and hoped that it would be accepted, yet dreaded that he would have to appear to answer for his act.

If dismissed, he would feel the blow keenly, yet his own heart would sustain his act in setting the renegade free, especially as he had sent to the Vigilantes, to be used as they deemed best, five thousand dollars, the amount of the reward which had been offered for the capture of the white chief.

By this they had simply lost the pleasure of punishing the man as they thought best, and, though he had escaped with his life, they had the amount of the price set on his head.

So stood matters with Dudley Delmont, and as the days went by he felt that he must act, for Yesula would wonder at his silence and certainly could not but feel worried that she had not a chance to give him answer one way or the other.

In speaking of his having gone out to the frontier to look him up, Aubrey Moore had said frankly to him that Yesula had suggested the idea, and he wondered why he had not thought of it himself, but was glad to go when she had asked it.

One day Dudley sat alone upon the piazza, enjoying the beauty of the afternoon, when King came out with a cream punch, for Doctor Fairfield, who had come over to visit the soldier socially, had told him to build himself up all he could and as an aid to this to take twice each day between meals a milk-punch, which the faithful valet had varied to cream.

Aubrey Moore had gone off some time before, and King had said he "Reckon'd he'd gone to the graveyard."

Then he asked his master if he had been there since his return.

"No, King, for the walk has been a little long for me, and I cared not to drive there; but I will go this afternoon."

"Yes, sah, for it's worth your while to see monument Massa Moore have put there, sah."

"A monument, King?" asked Dudley in surprise.

"Yes, sah; a great, tall stone monument, and on it are the names of Master, Missis and Missy Beatrice."

"This was noble of him," murmured Dudley Delmont.

And soon after he arose and walked out through the forest in the direction of the burying-ground.

It was the spot on the end of the ridge where he had heard that chorus of voices rolling down the hillside singing—

"Nearer My God to Thee,"

the day that he was returning to The Retreat on horseback, the day of his father's burial.

It was a long walk from the mansion, but he went briskly along and soon came in view of the sacred spot.

As he drew near he beheld through the trees a tall marble column.

Entering the little inclosure he stood with uncovered head by the side of the graves of his ancestors.

Beneath his feet lay the ashes of four generations of Delmonts, and above them, its large base spreading out so as to cover every grave, towered forty feet in air the superb marble shaft.

Upon one side was a large shield, and upon it, evidently copied from the family Bible of the Delmonts, were the names of the dead of four generations, over a score in number.

But upon one side was a large anchor, and upon it was engraven the name of Commodore Delmont, Dudley's father, who had been a distinguished naval officer, as has been said before.

The name of his wife, Dudley's mother, was inscribed beneath it, thus linking the two together in death, as in life.

Upon the next side was carved a lily, with broken stem, and beneath it was the name:

"BEATRICE DELMONT MOORE."

Then followed the date of her birth and death and the lines:

"On her quickening pulse  
Death laid his icy touch,  
And she became an angel."

The third square was occupied by the shield, with all the names together, as referred to, and the fourth side riveted the attention of Dudley Delmont.

There, exquisitely carved in the marble, were a sword and furled flag, a soldier's hat with plumes and a pair of spurs.

Beneath these were the words:

"The soldier's off duty forever."

Beneath this line had evidently been a name, but it had been cut out, and recently, for the dust and chippings were on the base then.

In fact the letters had not been wholly destroyed, the workman having not yet finished his work, for Dudley Delmont read there indistinctly several letters of his own name, and "U. S. Army" following them.

"Yes, this side bore my name, and Aubrey Moore has had a workman here cutting it out before I saw it."

"And he is doing his work well, for when finished, it would leave but the polished surface, and had I waited a day longer ere coming here, I would never have known, perhaps, that my name had been engraven hereon."

"Good, noble Aubrey, he is one indeed to love."

"Dudley, I thank you for those words," came from behind the soldier, and Aubrey Moore stepped to his side.

#### CHAPTER XXXVII. A MAN'S SACRIFICE.

DUDLEY DELMONT had uttered the words aloud, which had been overheard by Aubrey Moore, and he started slightly as the voice of the latter fell on his ear.

But he held forth his hand with a smile and said:

"That time, Aubrey, an eavesdropper, heard something good of himself."

"Yes, and I thank you," and Aubrey Moore had in his hand chisel and hammer, while he wore a heavy apron, as though having been at work.

"Let me tell you, Dudley, why your name is there, for I see you recognize it."

"You believed me dead, Aubrey?"

"Yes, and this square was left for your name, when you did die."

"I came here to The Retreat, friendless and unknown, having lost what inheritance I had looked forward to expect would be mine."

"Your father made me his secretary, paying me a large salary, and gave me his friendship with it."

"I learned to love him as my own father, and tried to love your sister as though she were my own, for poor and unknown as I was, I sought not at first to gain her affection."

"But, loving her as I did, and could not help doing, I was led to hope that she might one day become my wife, as your father had told me he would give her to me, as she had riches enough for both."

"He did, and Beatrice became my wife, and she too was soon lost to me."

"Was it a wonder then that I, loving them as I did, and owing all to your father should wish to place to their memory this tomb?"

"Poor Beatrice was lost beyond recovery of her body; but I placed her name here on this *in memoriam* marble column."

"I made it a family monument, looking up in the old Bible in the library, the names of the Delmonts who rested here."

"This side I left for you, when you should die, and alas! sooner far than I expected came the report of your death."

"Believing you dead I myself, for I learned the art of marble-cutting in years gone by, carved that design and your name there."

"With your return my desire was to erase it; but we were together much of the time, and I could only work at odd times."

"To-day I saw you coming and hid; but see-

ing that you had discovered all, I came forward to meet you and tell my simple story."

"Again I say, noble Aubrey Moore, you are a friend indeed; but leave the rest undone, excepting to smooth off my name, as you have nearly done so, and when I do die, it can be cut back into the marble."

"That is a beautiful line, Aubrey, 'The soldier's off duty forever,' and the design above most appropriate."

"I will watch your work, and we will return together."

Aubrey Moore at once resumed his work, and Dudley saw that he worked with an artistic hand.

At last the name, with dates of birth and death of Dudley Delmont were removed, and the line and design left.

Then Dudley said, after having remained silent for some time in deep meditation:

"Aubrey, I wish to ask you something?"

"Well, Dudley?"

"I desire you to answer me in all truthfulness, for it is a question of deep moment to me."

"I will do so, Dudley."

"I wish to ask you if you love Miss Yancey?"

Aubrey Moore's lip slightly quivered, and his face paled; but the smile did not fade from his eyes as he answered:

"I am very much attached to Miss Yancey, and think she is a most estimable lady, Dudley."

"Let me ask if there is aught between you, Aubrey?"

"Do you mean more than friendship?"

"Yes."

"No."

"You are sincere in this?"

"Perfectly, for my love is there, Dudley," and he turned and pointed to the name of Beatrice on the marble tomb.

But, had the soldier seen the look that swept over the handsome, splendid face of Aubrey Moore, he would have doubted his words that he did not love Yesula Yancey.

"I thank you, Aubrey, and I will tell you why I asked you."

"Since she was a little girl I have loved Yesula Yancey, and the grave between us only kept me from telling her so."

"When I saved her life and thereby met, I became more deeply attached to her than ever, and, as the hatchet between Judge Yancey and myself has been buried, I had hoped to win her love in return."

"You, of course, did not for a moment believe that Judge Yancey, as Brent Hastings charged, had been your intended assassin?"

"No, I could not believe that, and hence the duel that followed; but I feel that I have some secret foe, Aubrey, one who has dogged me here, as well as in the army, yet who he may be I am wholly at a loss to discover, nor do I know the reason of his hatred to me, though I might perhaps guess."

"I have returned home now, and to have you say what you do, lifts a great load from off my heart, for had you answered that you did love Miss Yancey, I would have yielded any claim of mine without a murmur."

"You are sure, Aubrey, that you do not love her?"

"Perfectly sure."

"And how does she feel toward you?"

"I have never asked her, but feel assured that she regards me only as a friend."

"In truth, Dudley, from what I saw of her when she asked me to go to seek you, and when we were all convinced that you were dead, I am sure that the love of her life was for you."

"Ah, Aubrey, you give me hope; but come, let us return, for I feel a little fatigued."

Together they walked away from the little cemetery, and while the shadows of night were beginning to creep, and walked slowly back to the mansion, Aubrey Moore taking off his apron and wrapping his tools up in it with the remark:

"My work is done, Dudley, and it certainly was a cheerful one, to cut your name off that marble tomb."

"I can well believe you, Aubrey, though my name being there from my death, would make you a millionaire."

"You are a strange man, Aubrey Moore, and a good one."

"I am the better for knowing such a nature as yours."

That night when Dudley Delmont retired to his room he said:

"I almost feel that Aubrey's pleasant mood to-night was forced, for the idea will haunt me that he loves Yesula Yancey."

"But he has disclaimed it, and I will leave it to her to decide."

"If she refuses me, then it is Aubrey whom she loves, and I will be as magnanimous as he has been and tell him to go and win her, while I will trample my love under foot for her."

"Ay, I will give to her as a bridal-gift the Red Diamonds, for both she and Aubrey laugh at superstitions, and the fatality of this haunted legacy, if fatality it really had, I believe has been utterly broken, since I have, as it were, triumphed over fate."

"Yes, the Red Diamonds shall be Yesula's, become she my wife or Aubrey Moore's, for a strange influence urges me on to break their deadly, fateful charm; but I wonder if Aubrey has sacrificed himself for me?"

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII. A CONFESSION.

WHEN Dudley Delmont arose, the morning after his visit to the family burying-ground, and his talk there with Aubrey Moore, King told him that Mr. Moore had gone to Washington, unexpectedly called there by a telegram received that morning.

Though regretting Aubrey's departure, Dudley felt that it would give him a chance to drive over to River Glade and know his fate from the lips of Yesula Yancey.

As she knew of his love for her, he could not longer refrain from relieving her of a painful situation, by boldly speaking out.

So he ordered the carriage for after dinner, not yet feeling strong enough to undertake the long ride there and back on horseback, though he was gaining his former vigor with gratifying rapidity.

When he drove up to the door of the River Glade mansion, Jerry, the butler, told him that the judge had gone over to the village on horseback, and that Miss Yancey had walked down toward the river, but he would at once send for her.

"No, I will seek her myself, thank you, Jerry," replied Dudley, and he sauntered off down the Glade.

A walk of half a mile brought him to an arbor, a favorite retreat of Yesula's, for it was on a point of land that commanded a fine view up and down the Potomac.

The judge had had the arbor built there, and a snug, comfortable place it was, with easy-chairs, a table, writing materials, and a hammock for an afternoon *siesta*.

In this arbor was Yesula, gracefully reclining in the hammock.

She heard the approaching step, but supposed it to be her father, or one of the servants, so continued on with the novel she was reading until a shadow darkened the doorway and a voice asked:

"Do I intrude, Miss Yancey?"

She started at the voice and quickly rose, blushing with pretty confusion, as she said:

"No, indeed, I am glad to see you, Captain Delmont, but had no idea when I heard your step that I would be caught thus by you."

She looked superbly beautiful in her walking-dress, and with her flushed face and hair half down.

"I beg pardon for coming unannounced, but Jerry told me I would doubtless find you here, and so I came to seek you, as your father was away."

"Are you alone, Captain Delmont, or did Mr. Moore accompany you?"

And Dudley thought there was a shade of anxiety in her tone.

"I regret to say that Mr. Moore was called to Washington to-day by a telegram."

"Nothing to be dreaded, I hope, for I so fear telegrams."

And she shuddered.

"I think not, or Aubrey would have left me some word."

"He simply told King to say to me he had gone on business, but would return in a few days."

"But do you know I am glad I came alone, for I wish to speak to you, Miss Yancey, upon a subject very near my heart."

She dropped her eyes, and he saw her face flush and pale again.

The motives that prompted it he could not fathom; but he had come to know his fate, so would not shrink the alternative now.

"Were it not, Miss Yancey, for the fact that I know you received a letter from me, I would not now, so soon after my return, tell you what now I have to say."

"But that letter was meant for your hands only in case of my death, and, believing me dead, King gave it to you."

"In it I said that which I would not have said, under the circumstances of our short and limited acquaintance; but I told only the truth, a truth which to-day I wish to repeat to you, and ask you if there is for my heart the slightest hope of my ever winning your love, a love which I prize beyond all else on earth?"

He spoke in a low, earnest voice, standing before her in all the splendor of his perfect manhood, and with his fine eyes fixed upon her face.

She had not looked up, her eyes resting upon the floor, and yet he saw that his words moved her deeply, yet for love of him or not he could not tell.

At last she looked up and met his gaze firmly, while she said, in a voice that was distinct, though very low:

"Captain Delmont, let me make a confession to you, one that is due to you and to myself."

"From my girlhood I had a strange desire to see the handsome, splendid youth that people told me the future master of The Retreat was."

"Because there was a grave between his

name and mine, I the more felt interest in him—yourself.

"Before we had met to speak a word, I learned that you had a portrait of me, one that you had secretly painted from a miniature which came into your hands.

"I felt angry that you had done such a thing, for I could not then understand your motive, and I intended to get that portrait from you.

"Then came the time when I owed my life to you, and we met.

"Next was your nobleness in coming to my home with me to meet my father, when he should have sought you, and your refusing to believe the vile charge of Brent Hastings, that my father was the one who had tried to assassinate you.

"Again you set your duel with Brent Hastings before the hour appointed for him to meet my father, thus saving his life.

"All these things made you dearer to me, and one day I analyzed my heart and knew that I loved you, though I tried hard not to admit it to myself.

"Then came the news of your death, and your letter, with the portrait.

"The former told me of your love, alas! when I believed it too late, and the latter proved it, for your skill made me very beautiful.

"I buried the memory of you in my heart, though I did have a tinge of hope that you were not dead.

"Then into my life came Aubrey Moore.

"He was so noble, so kind, spoke so sweetly of you, and I felt for him deepest sympathy for his lost bride, and pity is akin to love, it is said.

"With you living I never would have given him a place in my heart.

"Believing you dead, and thinking that in the end he would care for me, I allowed myself to think of him, to care very much for him, I fear; but it was not the love that I had felt for you.

"No, there can be but one love like that in a woman's heart, a woman's life.

"Not a word of love did he ever utter to me; but then a woman knows when a man feels her influence, and I knew that some day he would ask me to be his wife, though now his love is with his dead wife.

"Then you came back, and at once all my love to you, as of old, swelled up in my heart, and your coming taught me that I could only regard Aubrey Moore as a friend, as a dear brother.

"Now, Captain Delmont, you have my confession, and I leave it for you to say all that you think of me."

The "confession," as she called it, had been a very sweet one to Dudley Delmont, and he had listened to the simple unfolding of her heart for his gaze, with an interest that was intense.

When she had finished he stepped toward her and taking her hands in both his own said softly:

"Yesula, as you leave it for me to say what I think of you, I will do so.

"I think I will never be a happy man until you are my wife.

"Will you thus make me happy some day, Yesula?"

"Yes, Dudley, for I am selfish, and will but make myself happy in doing so," was the proud response.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### A SUMMONS.

SEVERAL days after his departure for Washington, Aubrey Moore returned to The Retreat, and Dudley Delmont drove over to meet him, for he had expected he would return by the steamer that afternoon.

"Ah, Dudley, this was kind of you," said Aubrey in his pleasant way, as he came toward the buggy, in which Dudley Delmont sat behind the two bays which Aubrey Moore had purchased some weeks before.

"I had an idea you would come, Aubrey, so drove over; but how suddenly you left the other day."

"Yes, and I will tell you why, as we drive home."

Getting into the buggy the bays were turned homeward, and then Aubrey Moore said:

"The truth is I got a letter from an old friend who was to be in Washington for some days, and who I knew had a great deal of influence with the President, and I wished this influence to be used in your behalf."

"In my behalf, Aubrey?" asked Dudley with surprise.

"Yes, for I fear, from what I heard that the court-martial will surely deal hard with you, and I wished to acquaint the President with the full facts beforehand.

"I saw my friend and placed the matter in his hands, at the same time telling him how badly wounded you had been, while you were by no means yet well of your hurts.

"He promised to do all he could for you, and found out that you will be summoned to Washington within the week."

"I am ready, Aubrey."

"Well, I hope it will go well with you then."

"I hope so, for I have no desire to be dismissed, though my own conscience will acquit me of blame in the matter.

"I should have felt guilty not to have saved Dick Darke, and I shall so state to my judges.

"But, Aubrey, I have something to tell you."

"Yes."

"I am engaged to be married."

"Indeed! I congratulate you," was the ready response.

"And to Yesula Yancey."

"You could not have chosen better, nor could she, I am free to admit; but when does this happy event come off?"

"During the coming winter, for, as I wish to have a grand reception after it in The Retreat, I wish to wait until little over a year has passed since poor Bea's death."

"You are right, for it would please me the more."

"But did you speak to her of your chances for dismissal from the army?"

"Yes, and she upholds my act, so it will make no difference to her, while what others think I do not care."

"Well, I wish you every joy, Dudley, and I will be your best man if you will let me."

"I would ask no one else, and, Aubrey, I have a plan on hand to ask you about."

"Well?"

"You know Echolands?"

"That grand old estate which for ten years has had no dweller on it?"

"Yes; but it is a very valuable property and will bring in a handsome income.

"It was willed to a wild fellow who had run away from home, when a mere boy, in case he should return within ten years.

"Now the ten years are nearly past, and at that time it is to be sold and the money given to charity.

"I have already made an offer for the property, and if it is sold, have the refusal of it at my price offered."

"You?"

"Yes, for I shall fit it up, furnish it handsomely, and there take my wife, while I give to you a full title to The Retreat."

"Oh, Dudley!" and the face of Aubrey Moore was a picture to behold.

"I shall do as I say, Aubrey, if I can buy Echolands, and you must marry some sweet girl and settle down to a life of perfect happiness."

Aubrey Moore seemed quite overwhelmed at the generosity of Dudley, and chatting pleasantly together, upon their plans for the future, the two reached home just at dark.

Awaiting him Dudley Delmont found letters, which King had brought from the village.

One was an official document, and breaking the seal Dudley found his orders to report in Washington without delay, and the statement that his resignation had not been accepted by the Secretary of War, pending his trial by court-martial for having given freedom to a renegade, deserter and murderer, and a man upon whose head a price had been set.

"I will go to Washington to-morrow, Aubrey," he said calmly, and the next morning, after a short visit to Yesula, he took the boat on her up-river run, accompanied only by his faithful servant King, for knowing that Aubrey Moore was needed on the plantation, he would not accept his offer to accompany him.

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE SENTENCE.

DUDLEY DELMONT appeared before his judges, calm and unruffled.

He held hope that he would not be dealt harshly with when all the facts of the case were made known.

He saw there as witnesses several of the Vigilantes, from whose hands he had rescued the renegade, and also the commandant of the fort to whom he had made his report and handed in his resignation.

The accusation against him was a severe one, looked at without the palliating circumstances being taken into consideration.

Among his judges Dudley Delmont regretted to see two brother officers who he feared would not hear his defense without prejudice.

These were a lieutenant, over whom he had been promoted, and who had shown much feeling against him for it.

The other was a captain whom he had once reprimanded for cruel treatment to one of his men.

But he made no claim of their unfriendliness to him and the case went on trial.

The Vigilantes told how they had captured the renegade, Dick Darke, in the settlement, spying out plans for a raid upon it with his Indians, and that Captain Dudley Delmont had demanded that they give him over to him, he promising to be responsible for him.

Then he had set the man free, giving him his horse and weapons.

The commandant reported that Captain Delmont had reported the affair to him, said that he would make known his motives, if required, and had then given him his resignation.

He was called upon for a complete history of

Dick Darke's deeds, and all seemed horrified at the renegade's crimes.

Then Dudley Delmont told his story.

He spoke of his being wounded, nigh unto death, and how Dick Darke, a former soldier in his company, had saved his life, and his motives for so doing.

Then he told how he had been brought to the Overland trail by Darke and given a horse, and all his belongings, had been chased by Indians, and escaping had sought shelter with a settler, where he had lain ill with a relapse for several weeks.

He admitted that he took Darke from the Vigilantes to save him from their cruel punishment, and showed how he had sent to them the price offered for the head of the renegade, which they were of course entitled to as his captors.

"I bade him go his way and lead a different life, and had I not have saved him, had I taken that man, who had, whatever his crimes might have been, so nobly served me, to the fort and there let him hang, when it was in my power to give him his life, I would have been recreant to every feeling of manhood, as I understand it; but if you, gentlemen, deem that I dishonored my rank as an officer, I am in your hands to suffer such punishment as you may choose to direct."

Such were the manly words of the young officer, and at their conclusion he left his case in the hands of his judges.

There was one old martinet on the court-martial who believed in seeing no "palliating circumstances" in a soldier's breach of discipline, and he was determined to make an officer, who had set free a renegade murderer, suffer for his act.

Then came the captain and lieutenant, both prejudiced against Dudley Delmont, and, pretending as they would that their feelings toward him in the past did not influence them then, they certainly were biased and agreed with the old officer that the act of Captain Delmont was one that merited punishment.

So it was decided that since he, as an officer, had so far forgotten himself, his resignation should not be accepted, but on the contrary he should be dismissed from the service.

The sentence read:

"Dismissed from the service for conduct unworthy and unbecoming an officer and gentleman, especially one who had held so distinguished a position as had the accused."

It was expected by the friends of Dudley Delmont that the President would not approve the sentence, but, from influence brought to bear upon him, would give the captain permission to resign.

But somehow "influence" failed to weld the Presidential mind in favor of Dudley Delmont, and he suffered the cruel sentence in silence, with his own conscience, however, to uphold him in what he had done, and the opinion of his friends and most of his army comrades that he had done right.

But military law is like adamant in its hardness, and Dudley Delmont felt keenly its mercilessness, though he uttered no word against those who had been his judges.

"Come, King, we will go down on to-night's boat," he said, returning to his room after the cruel sentence had been passed upon him, and ten days after his leaving home he was again in The Retreat, where Aubrey Moore saw by a glance at his face what the result had been.

"They dismissed me, Aubrey," he said, with a sad smile.

"Fools! I hope the renegade may some day get a chance at that court-martial, to avenge you."

The words were uttered earnestly, almost fiercely, and surprised Dudley, as never before had he seen Aubrey Moore exhibit temper.

"No, no; not so bad as that, I hope, for Dick Darke's revenge would be something to dread.

"And besides, I hope he has reformed; but now I will drive over and see what Yesula and the judge think of me now, as a cashiered officer."

And he laughed bitterly.

"They will welcome you the more warmly, Dudley, for they understand you, as I do," was the response of Aubrey Moore.

And he was right, for the judge consigned the court-martial to Satan's dominions as a pack of "donkeys in brass buttons," while Yesula whispered:

"I love you the more, Dudley, for the injustice which has been heaped upon you."

## CHAPTER XLI.

### AMATEUR THEATRICALS.

AN overflow had occurred in one of the river valleys of Virginia, and many poor people had been rendered destitute thereby.

So it was agreed among the good people dwelling neighborly to The Retreat and River Glade Plantations, to give an entertainment in their behalf.

In the six months that had passed since the coming home of Dudley Delmont, and his dismissal from the army, for his release of the renegade, Dick Darke, he had become a great favorite with all the neighbors, for leagues

around The Retreat, and he was one of those selected by the committee of arrangements to be the principal actor in the play chosen for the occasion.

Then, too, Aubrey Moore had been made manager, and Reuben Rolland, the young attorney who had been the second of Brent Hastings in his duel with the young soldier, was also to take one of the prominent parts.

Reuben Rolland had lately come in possession of a considerable legacy, and, mending his wild ways, as had Brent Hastings since he lost his arm, the two were everywhere received in the best society.

Among the ladies chosen was Yesula Yancey and pretty Lulu Sprague, the daughter of the clergyman who had performed the marriage ceremony for Aubrey Moore and Beatrice Delmont.

Then there was visiting Yesula at the time her friend Mrs. Jeffrey, of New York, who had won quite a name as an amateur actress, and the two had been set down for a leading part.

The engagement of Yesula Yancey to Dudley Delmont had been made known, and it was expected that they would be married within a few months.

Dudley Delmont had failed in his intended purchase of Echolands, as a letter had been received from the long-absent heir, telling the agent to wait his coming, and so the master of The Retreat and Aubrey Moore still dwelt together at the old home, and were like brothers in their regard for each other. Dudley, still believing that Aubrey had loved Yesula, was glad to see him paying some attention to the beautiful daughter of the Reverend Mr. Sprague, whose charge was across the Potomac, and hoped the fair girl would in time win his heart.

So matters stood at the time of the getting up of the amateur theatricals, and daily rehearsals for the occasion were held at first one house and then the other, after which there would be a gala time among the young people.

On account of the vast parlors, dining-room and halls adjoining, in The Retreat mansion, Dudley Delmont had offered his home for the performance, and every preparation had been made to make it a grand affair.

Tickets of invitation had been sent far and wide, and it was expected that every one accepting would pay a sum for their admission according to their generosity and means, thus swelling the amount up to a handsome figure in behalf of the charitable object for which it was intended.

It was the day previous to the one set for the performance, that Dudley Delmont was returning from River Glade, where he had been to a rehearsal, and had taken his gun on horseback with him, to kill any game that might cross his path going or coming.

Aubrey Moore was at The Retreat, getting the parlors and stage in readiness for the next night, and also looking to the grand supper which was to be given on the lawn by moonlight, after the performance.

Thinking to find some game along an unfrequented path, Dudley Delmont turned his horse into it, and was riding slowly along when a shot was heard not far ahead.

He drew rein and listened, and soon it came again.

The regularity with which it was repeated showed him that some one was evidently practicing at a target.

So he rode on, and his path led him directly upon a scene that, naturally, somewhat surprised him.

He beheld two men in a little vale, and before them was a target at which one of them was evidently firing, to make himself perfect in his aim.

One of the two had but one arm, and he was Brent Hastings.

He sat upon a log near by, a cigar between his lips, and was watching with deep interest the shots of his companion, who was none other than Reuben Rolland, his second in his duel with Dudley Delmont, who had caused him to lose his right arm by his deadly aim.

Between Dudley Delmont and Reuben Rolland there was an acquaintance but no friendship, though of late they had been thrown together intimately, for the two were the principal actors in the play that was to be performed upon the following night.

Since his duel with Brent Hastings, Dudley Delmont had simply bowed to him when they met, and the salute had been coldly acknowledged; but when the amateur theatricals were gotten up, as a one-armed officer was one of the parts, the young soldier had suggested that Hastings be asked, and he had written a note requesting him to drop past differences and appear.

This Brent Hastings had done, and both he and Reuben Rolland had appeared with Dudley Delmont in the rehearsals of the play and thus had met on terms of intimacy.

But when Dudley Delmont suddenly rode upon the scene in the little valley, it was a surprise all around, and one which showed that each of the trio had been taken wholly by surprise.

## CHAPTER XLII.

## THE STRANGE TARGET.

INTERESTED in their work, or amusement, whichever it might be to them, neither Reuben Rolland nor Brent Hastings had seen Dudley Delmont until he rode directly upon the scene and was within ten paces of them.

The velvetlike grass had drowned the hoof-falls and the conversation of the two men had fallen distinctly upon the ears of Dudley.

Over on the edge of the village, three miles away, Reuben Rolland lived, keeping Bachelor's Hall there and having his attorney's office in his house.

Beyond the village, on his mother's plantation, dwelt Brent Hastings, and the home of each was like their own, for the two were inseparable.

But, for some reason, perhaps from its great seclusion, the two friends had driven in a buggy to the spot where Dudley Delmont found them.

It had the appearance, too, of having been regularly frequented, for the buggy-tracks to and fro were numerous and the ground where the marksmen were had been well trampled down.

It was evident that the spot had been visited by the two friends scores of times for the purpose it was then being put to.

But what gave Dudley Delmont the greatest surprise was the target.

It was not really out of the way for two young men to go off to themselves and practice shooting; but then it was certainly out of the usual run for them to select a target such as they had.

It was upon the target that the eyes of Dudley Delmont became riveted.

He saw a large board set up against a tree, and upon this, cut out of paper, was the life-sized form of a man standing in the attitude of firing a pistol toward the one who aimed at him.

There was that about this form on the board that was most striking, as it was a most cleverly-executed likeness, from feet to hat, of Dudley Delmont.

His air, his style, the slouch of his hat and all had been caught exactly by the artist of the strange target, while to a quarter of an inch it was just his size.

Another most mysterious thing about the target was the fact that the heart, spinal column, and bones of the arms and legs, with the vital points in the head had been chalked out in red on the dummy form, and into these various bullet-marks had been pegged up.

Misses of the body had also been pegged on the board, but these were precious few, for the shooter had improved well by constant practice.

As Dudley Delmont rode up here is what he heard:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

It was Brent Hastings who asked the momentous question, and Reuben Rolland, pistol in hand, stood but a few paces away, and ten in front of the portrait target.

"Ay ay, sir," came from Reuben Rolland's lips.

"Aim at Delmont's neck this time and put a bullet squarely in it," was said *sotto voce*, and then followed aloud:

"Fire! one! two—"

On the word two the pistol was fired and the shot, true to the coacher's instructions, sped directly into the vertebrae marked on the portrait.

"A dead shot that, Attorney Rolland."

The man addressed started, as did his companion, and both looked around to behold Dudley Delmont gazing at them with a smile that was by no means a cordial one.

"Ha! eavesdropper! you have heard that which is unpleasant to you?" cried Reuben Rolland, his face paling with anger.

"These woods are on the estate of Echolands, gentlemen, and to which I have free access, by permit of the agent."

"I was riding and looking for game, and coming this way surprised you in your little practice plot to get rid of me."

"I congratulate you upon the excellence of your target, and you, Mr. Rolland, upon your very crack shooting; but perhaps, if you had to face the original, your aim would not be so true."

The words were calmly uttered, cutting, and made both men wince; but Brent Hastings rallied quickest and said fiercely:

"Yes, Dudley Delmont, Reuben Rolland is practicing for a duel with you, he having volunteered, as my friend, to avenge me whom you have maimed for life."

"Your aim is well known, and he was practicing to place himself upon even terms, and now you know what you may expect."

"I am wholly at the service of your friend, Mr. Hastings, at any time, and when we meet I shall take care not to cripple him, as your empty sleeve has touched my conscience deeply whenever we have met."

"I believe I would rather dig Mr. Rolland's grave for him than cripple him, so when we

meet he need look for no mercy whatever at my hands."

"Let that meeting be now," cried Reuben Rolland, with angry vehemence.

"No, for we are all pledged in a good cause for to-morrow night, and nothing shall prevent its being carried through to the end."

"You are welcome at my home, gentlemen, to-morrow night, and I shall treat you as though this scene had never occurred; but have your seconds, and your surgeon, if you think one necessary, and I will have mine, so that our meeting can be at sunrise on the morning following the performance for charity."

"I prefer now."

"Nothing, Mr. Rolland, shall allow me to break through with the plans made to-morrow night in a good cause, and I beg you to aid me in this, gentlemen."

"It shall be as you say," sullenly said Reuben Rolland, and with a bow Dudley Delmont rode on his way, leaving the two young men completely nonplused at having been caught at their target practice by the man they wished to kill.

"It will but expedite matters, and bring on the duel sooner than we wished; but he is right about the charity performance, for it must not be broken through with."

"Now to my practicing again, and I must not miss a shot, so call out, just before the word, the vital spot you wish me to hit," and Reuben Rolland again took his stand, his pistol ready, and in the next hour did not make a single miss. "I shall kill him, Brent," he said, as they prepared to leave the spot.

"Yes," was the earnest response of Brent Hastings.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

## PREPARED.

DUDLEY DELMONT rode slowly on to The Retreat, after his meeting with Reuben Rolland and Brent Hastings in the woods.

He found that Aubrey Moore had all in readiness for the theatricals on the following night, and only the edibles were to be prepared upon which the couple of hundred people expected would feast.

"You deserve credit, Aubrey, great credit," said Dudley, as he looked at the grand parlors, with the halls and piazzas, all arranged so as to give good seats to the audience.

Then the dining-room, with its massive folding doors, was to be the stage, and the breakfast-room and an antechamber the dressing-rooms for the performers.

A long table had been set out on the lawn, and the trees were filled with lanterns to aid the moon in giving light to the feast.

In fact, all had been done that was possible to make the affair a grand success, and Dudley Delmont congratulated Aubrey Moore over and over again upon his ingenuity and management.

Aubrey wore his honors modestly and seemed pleased with the praise of his friend.

"How different it would be for us, Dudley, were Beatrice only here," he said, sadly.

"Yes, it is just thirteen months to-night since poor Bea was lost; but, by the way, Aubrey, that pretty Mrs. Jeffrey, Yesula's friend, is as superstitious as she can be, and seemed really alarmed to-day when she made the discovery that there were just thirteen actors and actresses in the play."

"Nonsense!"

"So I told her; but she would not be quieted, and begged Yesula not to wear the Red Diamond necklace which I gave her, for her part as Princess in the play."

"Mrs. Jeffrey is a little goose, and should not put such foolish ideas into Miss Yesula's head."

"Oh, Yesula does not care, and says she will wear the Red Diamonds to test them again, and I am glad that she has the pluck; but, Aubrey, there is one thing I wish to speak to you about."

"I am all attention, Dudley."

"Well, as we have finished dinner, let us go out upon the piazza, and as we smoke I will tell you."

Aubrey Moore saw that Dudley Delmont really had something of importance to communicate, and as the two took their easy-chairs upon the piazza, and lighted their cigars, he said:

"Now, Dudley, what is it that worries you?"

"I will tell you what I saw down in the Echoland woods, and I think you will be as surprised as I was," and Dudley Delmont made known to his friend what he had discovered Reuben Rolland and Brent Hastings engaged in down in the woodland.

"You amaze me, Dudley, for this seems like a perfectly formed plot to call you out and kill you."

"Yes."

"And Rolland has taken up the gantlet and is to avenge Hastings?"

"So it seems."

"And has been practicing daily, doubtless since the plot was conceived?"

"Yes, I judge so."

"And you?"

"Have not fired a pistol for six months."

"It is a pity, for you are out of practice."

"I shall go out in the morning and get my hand in again; but you must second me in this affair, Aubrey."

"Certainly."

"And I shall ask Doctor Fairfield to be my surgeon, so will send a note to him to-night ere they engage him."

"Do so, for he is skilled in such things, as both surgeon and second."

"And it would be well to have another along as a witness, and some one who is friendly to both parties."

"As you think best, Aubrey."

"I wish to have no shadow upon the meeting, and it must be known by outsiders, not interested in you, just what you discovered."

"Very well."

"And I will drop a note to Hastings to-night, appointing time and place, and asking him to also bring a witness and a surgeon, but not to allow a word to get out about the affair to those who are to attend the theatricals, for it would never do to stop that."

"No, indeed, so I told them."

"It was thoughtful of you, Dudley, to put it off until after the performance, and ask them to appear as though nothing had happened to mar the scene; but is it not strange that in the play you have a duel scene with Reuben Rolland?"

"I thought of that, and it impressed me as a coincidence."

"How people will think the next day, when they hear that a real duel followed the mimic one."

"And it is to be with pistols too!"

"The real duel?"

"No, the mimic one."

"Well, it cannot be helped now; but none but those in the secret must suspect anything wrong, and I shall be particularly marked in my politeness to Rolland and Hastings, and wish you also to be, Aubrey."

"I will, Dudley; but now let me write the letters to the doctor, and to Antwerp as a witness," and thus the affair was dropped between the two to await the mock and real tragedy to follow.

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

##### THE TRAGEDY.

THE evening set for the dramatic performance at The Retreat came around bright and beautiful.

The air was balmy, a full moon rose above the horizon to lend its light to the scene, the roads were in prime condition, and there was not a single drawback to the carrying out of the affair with great *eclat*.

At sunset those who were to participate in the play began to arrive, and as master of ceremonies, Aubrey Moore received the guests upon the broad piazza.

Pretty Lulu Sprague, with her father, came early, accompanied by a number of guests from across the river, who were only too willing to give their aid to charity.

Then came the Yanceys, father and daughter, and with them lovely Mrs. Jeffrey, who was on a two months' visit to her old friend and school-mate, Yesula. Reuben Rolland and Brent Hastings arrived next, in the latter's family-carriage, and Dudley Delmont came forward and greeted them most cordially, which pleased those who saw it, as they were glad to see that the hatchet had been buried by Hastings, who had lost his arm under the deadly aim of the master of The Retreat.

Soon all of the participants in the play had arrived, and these were busy looking over their "parts" for the evening.

The lanterns were lighted in the grounds, and as the carriages began to roll up with their many loads, the scene was picturesque and inviting in the extreme.

Many also came upon horseback, and by eight o'clock over two hundred gay guests had assembled in the grand old mansion of the Delmonts.

The cause of charity had certainly brought forth a large gathering, and most liberal indeed were the prices paid for the tickets.

At last the audience was called together, by the playing of the orchestra, and assembled in the large parlors.

Every point of vantage for seeing was seized upon, and the hum of voices ceased as the curtain was rung up.

Though amateurs, the actors acquitted themselves splendidly and won rounds of applause, Yesula Yancey and Mrs. Jeffrey being particularly good in their acting and looking most lovely in their superb toilets, while Lulu Sprague, as a *soubrette*, brought down the house with her excellent delineation of a character part.

Dudley Delmont looked really grand in his uniform as a Mexican colonel, the rival of Reuben Rolland, who was a diplomat, and both in love with Yesula, who impersonated a Spanish Princess traveling in Mexico, where she had rich mines.

Yesula wore the Red Diamonds in an evening scene, and about her neck there was a perfect blaze of light cast forth from the superb gems,

and those who knew their fateful history wondered that she had the courage to wear the necklace, while others condemned Dudley Delmont for giving them to her. Delmont was really a fine actor, as also was Reuben Rolland, and the scenes between them were loudly applauded, while Brent Hastings, as a one-armed *aide* to the Mexican colonel, rendered his part excellently well.

At last the scene came where the fickle Spanish Princess, Yesula, not knowing which of her two ardent admirers, Dudley or Rolland, she loved most, told them to decide the matter between themselves.

This they decided to do by a duel, and the survivor was to claim her hand and return with her to Spain.

As the diplomat, Rolland, was not a swordsman, it was decided to settle the question with dueling-pistols, and all held their breath, so real seemed the acting, as the two took their stands.

All in the audience remembered, when Brent Hastings was in the play seconding Dudley Delmont, that a year before they had stood face to face in a real duel, and the empty sleeve of Hastings was the result.

Then Reuben Rolland had seconded Hastings, and now he was in this mock duel the principal.

The duelists were ready, the Princess stood ready to rush upon the scene, to greet the victor, and give him her hand, when the curtain would go down and the play would end.

Brent Hastings gave the word to fire, the pistols flashed together as one weapon, and Reuben Rolland, as was intended, fell to the ground with a remarkable semblance to a death-fall.

Then the Princess dashed on the scene and the curtain fell.

All of the participants at once hastened to the dressing-rooms, all but two.

Those two were Dudley Delmont and Reuben Rolland, and the manager, Aubrey Moore, was bending over the latter, who still lay upon the stage where he had fallen.

"My God! Dudley, he is really dead, for a bullet has pierced his brain. In the name of Heaven, did you do this wrong?"

The words came from Aubrey Moore. Delmont sprung to the side of the fallen man, just as Brent Hastings stepped out from amid the scenery and cried:

"Yes, he did commit this crime, for now I recall what I saw him do in loading his pistol. Dudley Delmont, you shall hang for this murder!"

#### CHAPTER XLV.

##### BEFORE THE TRIAL.

THE scene that followed the announcement that the mock tragedy had been turned into a real one, beggars description.

There were many present who at once looked upon the deed as accidental on the part of Dudley Delmont.

But rumors went the rounds that in Dudley Delmont's dressing-room several bullets had been found, and Brent Hastings had seen him cut a piece out of a kid glove, which could only be wanted to wrap a bullet in.

Like a man who had been struck a blow that dazed him, Dudley Delmont seemed after the affair.

He had said:

"This is horrible! he is dead!"

Then he had uttered no other word at Brent Hastings's charge of murder, and had walked away with Aubrey Moore, who seemed almost equally crushed by the blow.

A moment after Aubrey Moore came out and tried to have the festivities go on; but with the dead form of Reuben Rolland lying in one room and Dudley Delmont under a volunteer guard in another, they were glad to hasten away from the scene which had so suddenly been changed from joy into sorrow.

Judge Yancey had hastened to see Dudley Delmont and assure him that he did not believe him guilty, and Yesula had written just a line by her father and sent it to her lover.

That line was:

"I believe you as innocent as I know myself to be."

Then the Yanceys and Mrs. Jeffreys their guest had departed for River Glade, and soon after The Retreat was left in gloom, for an officer of the law had taken Dudley Delmont off to the county jail and Aubrey Moore was alone, pacing the broad piazza with quick, nervous tread.

From the trees the lanterns had been taken, the uneaten feast had been cleared away and the lights in the mansion had been extinguished, excepting the one that burned in the hall and library and in the room where the two watchers sat with the dead body of Reuben Rolland.

The next day an inquest was held over the remains of the dead attorney, and at it the facts were brought out that Dudley Delmont was to have fought a duel with the man he had killed at sunrise the following morning.

And so it was settled by the coroner and his jury that "Reuben Rolland came to his death at the hands of Dudley Delmont, who had

viciously and for the sake of removing from his path a foe thus plotted to destroy him."

This settled the case beyond all chance of bail, and Dudley Delmont was forced to remain in the village jail to await his trial.

And before that trial day came, rumor was busy and all sorts of stories were in circulation against the young master of The Retreat.

It was said that he had been a very wild boy, and at West Point as a cadet had never been popular.

Then the story was told how he had freed Dick Darke the renegade, and more that he had accepted a bribe from him for doing so.

He was unpopular with his men, and more he had been dismissed in disgrace from the army.

All these rumors grew from mole-hills to mountains, as they passed from lip to lip, and when it was known that he had given his sister the Red Diamonds, knowing their fatal power, to get rid of her, it was said, so as to have her fortune, Dudley Delmont had been painted as black as it was possible for him to be.

He was also blamed for having given the Red Diamonds to Yesula Yancey, and putting this fact with the tragedy together, the fatal necklace was set down by the superstitious as still carrying out its deadly work.

And meanwhile the unfortunate prisoner paced his prison room, and got what comfort he could out of his surroundings.

Each day had Aubrey Moore visited him, and he had gotten the jailer to let him give him what comfort he could, and paid a round price for the privilege too.

The little room had been kalsomined and otherwise freshened up, a carpet put on the floor, and a neat set of furniture placed in it.

Then King had been allowed to be his cook and attendant, and books and papers were constantly sent to him by his devoted friend.

The jailer was a man who loved gold, and when Aubrey Moore paid liberally he got every concession he asked that was consistent with the safe keeping of the prisoner.

Calm and seemingly indifferent, Dudley Delmont appeared, and to all inquiries had simply said that he was wholly innocent and had never loaded the pistol with bullet, the latter found in his room, and the cut kid glove having been placed there by him in the afternoon, when he had returned from practicing with that very weapon.

Aubrey Moore had engaged for him the finest legal talent in the State, but as Reuben Rolland had been one of the legal fraternity, there was no end of "offers of services" from distinguished lawyers to aid to hang the man who had dared lay violent hands upon one of their cloth.

Since that little line sent by her father, Yesula had not written a word to her over, and Judge Yancey had called but once.

But he had told Aubrey Moore to command his services, to defend the prisoner, and this was equivalent to Delmont as an avowal that through all he believed in his innocence.

Mrs. Jeffrey was not one to desert a friend in distress, so she extended her visit indifferently, intending to remain after the trial, for she feared the worst for the accused man.

Thus the days dragged their weary length along until the one set for the trial dawned, and the prisoner was brought before the bar of justice to answer the charges against him.

#### CHAPTER XLVI.

##### CONDEMNED.

It was all so sudden, and so rapidly done, so soon over.

The court-house was crowded, and many said that it was a foregone conclusion and the prisoner must hang.

The "intelligent jury" were soon in their seats, the lawyers for and against had taken their places, his Honor looked stern and the case was opened.

Witnesses appeared who seemed to have learned their testimony to recite it from memory, and it soon was shown that Dudley Delmont, fearing to meet so dead a shot as Reuben Rolland was proven, had taken advantage of the duel scene in the play to kill him, thinking that it would be regarded as an accident.

There were witnesses who tried hard to save Dudley Delmont, and Aubrey Moore had several severe spats with the lawyers of the prosecution for running in gratuitous testimony, and his wit generally brought a laugh upon the attorneys; but it was all to no avail, the jury was convinced that there had been foul play, and with but a few moments' deliberation brought in a verdict of guilty.

Without the change of a muscle, Dudley Delmont heard the result, and through the whole trial his manly bearing had won admiration from all.

When asked what he had to say, he told his story simply, of meeting Reuben Rolland and Brent Hastings in the woods, and all that had occurred, while he ended with:

"For two years I have felt that I had some secret foe, but it has been beyond my power to discover who it was."

"The man that killed my friend, Captain

Mortimer Bainbridge, believing him to be me, the one who fired upon me from an ambush, when I was escorting Miss Yancey home, and he who has now brought me to the gallows by putting that bullet in my pistol, are one and the same.

"Some day he will be known, and the stain on my name will be cleared away; but it will be when I am in my grave, having been strangled out of life for a crime of which I am innocent."

"Your Honor, I am ready to receive sentence."

A deathlike silence rested upon all as the stern, clear voice of Dudley Delmont ceased, and every eye was upon him, while the judge, in a voice that quivered with emotion, passed sentence upon his prisoner.

That sentence was that within a few weeks, upon a certain day named, he was to be taken from the county jail and hanged by the neck until life had left his body.

Dudley Delmont bowed and turned to the officer who had him in charge, and once more he went back to his desolate room in the jail.

Thither Judge Yancey and Aubrey Moore followed him.

Through the whole trial, with Mrs. Jeffrey by her side, Yesula had sat pale-faced and anxious, and only when the sentence came did she utter a word.

Then she moaned forth to Mrs. Jeffrey:

"Oh, Kate! they will hang an innocent man."

When Judge Yancey entered the prison with Aubrey Moore, he handed to Dudley Delmont a slip of paper.

The condemned man greeted them pleasantly and bade them be seated, while he said, with no sign of the shadow upon him either in voice or face:

"Well, gentlemen, the trial is over, and I must thank you, Judge Yancey, as my lawyer, and you, Aubrey, as the best witness I had."

"When you have time, judge, come in please, for I wish to get my affairs to rights, and make a few changes in my will, for I intend to give King his freedom papers and a small sum to start him in life."

"The Red Diamonds go to your daughter, along with some papers and odds and ends I have, and after my lawyers are paid, all the rest goes to Aubrey here, as before."

There was not a tremor in the voice, not a sign of sorrow or despair upon the handsome face, and, deeply touched, Judge Yancey and Aubrey Moore soon after took their leave and Dudley Delmont was left alone to his own bitter meditations.

Thus the days dragged along until a week had passed, and one afternoon, just before sunset, Jailer Grasp came into the prisoner's room.

There was an air of mystery about him, and he seemed nervous withal, for he looked about him cautiously before he spoke.

Then he said in a low tone, although there was no one near to hear him, other than the prisoner:

"Captain Delmont, I want a word with you, sir."

"Very well, Mr. Grasp," was the reply of Dudley Delmont, who sat by the grated window, his ankles heavily ironed to a ringbolt in the floor.

"I've got a plan, sir."

"Well?"

"For you to escape, sir."

The prisoner started, and the jailer took from his coat-pocket a package and handed it to him.

"There, sir, that will tell you all, and I might as well say now that we'll start right after closing-up time to-night, for I will have a carriage ready to drive you to the river, where there will be a craft for us to go on board."

"Do you mean for me to escape, Grasp?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are to go with me?"

"Fact is, sir, I've lost considerable of the jail funds in gambling, and it will be found out in a few days, when pay-day comes, and I've got to go too."

"Then, if I let you go, and remained, why they'd hang me in your stead, for the people has got their heads set for a hanging."

"Well, if you are going to be good enough to save my neck, I do not see why I should be heroic and stay here and get it stretched when I am innocent of all crime."

"Mr. Moore has put you up to this, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Indeed?"

"No, sir."

"Who then?"

"Miss Yancey."

Dudley Delmont's face flushed, but he made no reply, and the jailer said:

"The package is from her, sir; but Mr. Aubrey Moore had a talk with me too about your escape, and Miss Yancey lost no time in acting, and the result is you won't hang and I won't have to get into a cell in this jail for using the funds that were placed in my keeping."

"You confess yourself a thief then, Grasp?"

"That is a hard name, Captain Delmont, to

call a man who is saving you from the hangman."

"You are saving yourself in the main, and for letting me escape are feathering your nest, I am sure."

"But then, I believe you have no wife or children, and if this proves a lesson to you, you can go elsewhere and live an honest life."

"It's a strange thing, sir, to be lectured by a man who has a hangman's noose about his neck."

"The difference between us, Grasp, is that I am innocent of murder and you are guilty of theft."

"But let us not discuss that, for I appreciate your aiding me and shall avail myself of your kindness and aid."

"At what time did you say?"

"A carriage is to come here, sir, after night, pretending to bring a prisoner."

"You are to be ready and leave in it, and I go with you, telling my assistant I shall only drive down as far as the tavern in the village, and taking good care he does not see you go out."

"I will return soon, tell him I changed my mind, let him go to bed, and, as it is my watch night, will lock up all and leave the jail, joining the carriage where it awaits me in the woods."

"Now, sir, I must leave you, and by opening the package you will doubtless find other instructions and money, while I have a few hundreds of yours, placed in my keeping when you came to the jail, which I will hand over to you."

"I thank you, Grasp."

"You are a good fellow, and though I regret that you fell from grace, I am glad that you selected just this time for it, when I am your prisoner and the shadow of the gallows grows deeper upon me every day."

"There is little preparation that I have to make, so you may expect me to be ready, and, as for the few hundred I turned over to your keeping, keep the money, as I happen to have a supply of funds sewed up in my vest, which I was thoughtful enough to bring from home with me the night of my alleged murder of poor Rolland."

"Now I will see what the contents of this package are," and Dudley Delmont turned toward the window as though he wished to end the interview, and Jailer Grasp departed from the room to the better perfect his plans for the bold game he was to play that night.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE RED DIAMONDS AGAIN.

THE package which Jailer Grasp had given to Captain Delmont was about eight inches long by five in width, and fully four deep. It was closely wrapped and sealed, bearing the mark upon the seal of a letter Y.

Dudley knew the seal, for often had he received a letter from Yesula, in his days of love-making, bearing the same stamp.

He broke the seal, and to his surprise when he unwrapped the paper he recognized the leather box which he knew held the Red Diamond necklace.

Why had Yesula sent that gift of his to her, to him in the jail? he wondered.

He touched the spring which opened the box, and there, upon its velvet cushion, lay the magnificent necklace, the jewels sparkling in the last rays of the setting sun.

But there was something else than the Red Diamonds in the casket, for a letter was there, and also a roll of bank-notes.

The face of the young man flushed as he beheld the latter; but he took them up and counted them.

There were just three hundred dollars in small bills.

Then Dudley opened the note, and his lips became firm set as he read it, and he seemed deeply moved by the contents.

What he read was as follows:

"RIVER GLADE, NOV. 30, 1858.

"Are you aware, Dudley, that to day was the one set on which we were to be married?"

"Does it impress you as it does me?"

"The most painful memories come over me now as I write, and yet they are tinged with joy that I have it in my power to serve you."

"Not for a moment have I ever dreamed that you were guilty, and hence my love for you has but increased tenfold for you in your deep sorrow and despair."

"When the judge passed sentence upon you I made a vow that you should not die on the gallows."

"I shall keep it this night, that follows the day on which I now write to you."

"I know that if you are free, you may be able in time to prove your innocence."

"You have said that you have a secret foe."

"I feel that it is so."

"Free, and in disguise, you can hunt down that foe and bring him to justice, and thus free your noble name from all stain."

"If you hang, the stain will ever remain."

"To save you has been my every thought, and Clarice Jeffrey has been my strong ally and aid."

"Without her I fear I should have failed."

"I thought of speaking to father upon the subject and seeking his aid, but feared to do so, for men are not secretive enough where momentous questions are involved."

"Then your noble friend, Aubrey Moore came to me and asked me to put my woman's wit to work to discover some plan to aid your escape."

"I promised to do so, and then Clarice said we would save you ourselves, asking no aid, and then Aubrey Moore and my father would not be compromised and could swear to clean hands in the matter."

"I studied your jailer's face and I thought he looked like a man who made gold his god."

"So I dropped him a note to drive out to a certain point and hear something to his advantage."

"He came, and I boldly offered to pay him a good sum if he would let you escape."

"He put it upon the plea of pity for you, belief in your innocence, and said that he would; but also stated that he would have to go too, and thus lose a lucrative position."

"Life is dearer than gold, and your life above all, Dudley, so I offered him three thousand dollars."

"He asked five and I agreed, and then told him my plan."

"Mrs. Jeffrey was compelled to return home, so she was to stop in Washington and engage passage for you on a ship that sails to-day for South America."

"As it comes down the river to-night you are to join her in a small fishing-craft, which will carry you out to her, and whose two seamen dear Lulu Sprague engaged for me on the Maryland shore, I have paid half their money."

"These two men are also to hire a carriage, for they are unknown in Virginia, and drive to the jail, when Mr. Grasp is to arrange the escape, and I advise you to ask him for a razor that you may shave off your luxuriant beard, though I should hate to see you lose it."

"Still Dudley, take no chances and sacrifice your beard and pretty, waving hair too."

"Your passage will be paid on the ship, and the two men and the jailer will have their money, so it leaves me but little to send to you, for I got all I dared from father, and Clarice helped me out with more than half from what she had saved up."

"A letter from her to day says that your state-room is engaged and all ready, so I live in hope that there will be no mistake."

"When you are safe write me, to the care of Clarice Jeffrey, tell me where you are, and if you wish me to come to you, I will gladly do so, if it be to the uttermost parts of the world."

"As I have no more money, and fear that you have not, I send you the Red Diamonds."

"I wore them that awful night, you remember, so I beg you to get rid of this haunted legacy and sell them."

"What they bring you will be a small fortune, and if you wish me to come to you, then I will bring my own little fortune, which I have independent of father."

"Could I get hold of it now I would do so; but it is invested beyond immediate recall; so sell the Red Diamonds and never let them stand in your way again."

"They have an evil glitter as I look at them now."

"But my letter is growing too long, and I believe I have told you all. Write to me, as I said, to Clarice's care, for you know her address, and tell me of yourself."

"Now, dearest Dudley, I will say God bless you and *au revoir*, for I will not let it be good-by."

"With love."

"Devotedly,"

"YESULA."

Such was the letter, and Dudley Delmont read it over and over again until it grew too dark for him to see the lines.

Then he placed it away in his pocket, along with the Red Diamonds, and said in a low, earnest tone:

"God bless her for a true woman."

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### UNDER THE SHADOWS OF NIGHT.

WHEN Dudley Delmont had thought over the letter of Yesula, and the bold plan she had laid for his escape, he arose, and making his way slowly to the little table in his room, lighted a lamp.

His chains were heavy and galling, but he did not think of them now, and opening his dressing-case, he took therefrom razors and scissors.

Then began the work of cutting off his magnificent long brown beard, which never before had been cut.

The scissors having done its work, the razors, souvenirs of West Point cadet days, were brought into use and made his face as clean of beard as a boy's.

Then his traps were packed, and putting out the lamp, he sat waiting for the coming of the jailer.

He heard a carriage drive up to the jail, and soon after Grasp appeared. The jailer had his lantern, and by its light Delmont saw that he was white and scared-looking.

"Brace up, man, and be cool," he said.

"You are certainly cool as an icicle, sir but you startled me with your beard off," was the nervous response.

"Is all in readiness to depart?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then unlock my irons and let us be off."

This the jailer did with trembling fingers, and soon the two descended to the first floor.

Grasp had gotten rid of his assistant by treating him so liberally to liquor that he had gone to bed, so that a clear field was before them.

Outside the gate stood a carriage and two horses, and upon it was a driver, while two men stood near.

"Have you the prisoner we came after, jailer?" asked one of the men.

"Yes, here he is," was the reply, and Dudley was hustled into the carriage.

The jailer locked his gate and sprung in also, and the two men followed, after giving some instructions to the driver.

Then the vehicle rolled away in the darkness, and two hours after drew up at the banks of the Potomac, at the ferry where Black Ben had so long been ferryman.

The negro ferryman was called up and ordered to take the carriage over, and the wind being fair it was done within half an hour.

Then the ferry-boat put back, and the carriage rolled away inland, while the jailer, Dudley Delmont and the two men followed a path down the shore until they came to a point where a small boat was drawn out upon the bank.

Off-shore a short distance a fishing-smack lay at anchor, and on board of this the party were soon standing.

Sail was then set, the anchor gotten up and the little craft went skimming along up the river.

She had not gone very far before one of the men said:

"We timed well, for yonder comes your craft, mates."

He pointed as he spoke to a large vessel coming down the river under a pressure of canvas.

Running near, the skipper of the smack hailed:

"Ship ahoy!"

"Ay, ay," was the response in a gruff voice.

"Is that the clipper ship *Wave Queen*?"

"Ay, ay, my man."

"We have passengers for you."

"So I thought when you hailed, for we were to pick up some off here."

"I will luff sharp and you can run alongside."

These maneuvers were carried out and Dudley Delmont and Grasp stepped on board the clipper ship, the former slipping into the hands of each of the two men a handsome little souvenir in the shape of bank notes.

Then the fine ship went on her way and Dudley Delmont, after having gone to his state-room and left his traps, stood upon the deck watching the Virginia shores, while Grasp, still nervous, he advised to turn in for the night.

As the gallant ship sped along down the river her course was such that she had to tack across toward the Virginia shore, and there being ample water the pilot stood well in.

Just where she went about to stretch away down the majestic Potomac, was directly opposite the River Glade mansion, and Dudley Delmont beheld up the valley, not a quarter of a mile distant, the lordly home of the woman he so dearly loved.

Had she thought that he would be on the deck watching the Virginia shore, that she had placed a bright light in her window, for his eyes to see?

It would seem so, for the light he did see, and it was like a beacon of hope to him, while he pictured her as being within a few feet of that lamp thinking of him.

In one thing he was right, in the other wrong. She was not near the lamp, and she was thinking of him.

But in her anxiety about him she had taken her father's night-glass and crept out of the house, after placing the lamp in the window.

She had called to the three large watch-dogs to follow her, and like a thief in the night had stolen away from the mansion, down to the little arbor on the river-bank, where Dudley Delmont had found her that day and asked her some day to be his wife.

There, with the dogs as her only guardians, and good ones they were, too, she had stood gazing out over the river through her glass.

At last she had spied the large ship, saw the little smack run toward it and both seem to stop.

Then the smack had sailed back toward the Maryland shore, and the big ship had held on down the river, and when she went about, Dudley Delmont, on her deck, was within a hundred yards of the woman who had saved him from the hangman.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### NO CLEW.

Of course suspicion fell at once upon Aubrey Moore, when the assistant jailer, clearing the cobwebs of stupor from his eyes the following morning, reported that Dudley Delmont had escaped.

At first it was supposed that Dudley had cruelly murdered the honest jailer and thus made his escape.

But the body of Mr. Grasp could not be found, and an investigation into his accounts showed that he had appropriated all the funds that were in his possession.

It furthermore leaked out that Aubrey Moore had paid him large sums to add to the comfort of his distinguished prisoner, and so it was wisely decided by all that Jailer Grasp had betrayed his trust, accepted a bribe and skipped for parts unknown with the man he had had in charge.

In the first wild disappointment at missing a hanging, and stretching a neck so aristocratic as Captain Delmont's, the officials acted hastily, for they sent off to arrest Aubrey Moore, did

arrest Watts, the assistant jailer, and rung the alarm to arouse the people and set a hundred horsemen loose over the country, with guns and dogs, to run down the prisoner and bring him back dead or alive.

The posse that went to The Retreat were told that Mr. Moore was not at home.

"Where was he?"

"Gone to Washington, sah."

"When?"

"Two days ago, sah."

"Are you sure?"

"Yas, sah."

"We shall search the house."

King could offer no resistance to this, and in the midst of the search a hired vehicle from the town, twenty miles distant, drove up and Aubrey Moore sprung out.

He looked surprised, and was amazed when told that Dudley Delmont had escaped.

But he was mad at the high-handed acts of the posse, and they became thoroughly convinced of this fact, while those who had never seen him in anger before thought that he could get madder in the shortest time than the maddest man they had ever seen in his wildest tantrums.

The party went back to the village, but Mr. Moore did not accompany them as a prisoner.

He said that he should drive over later.

And he did.

He then heard the full particulars, and though he said frankly he had been hoping to be able to get Dudley Delmont free, he had not done so, and he could readily prove an *alibi*.

So all the blame then turned upon the jailer, and, as the man-hunters, with their dogs and guns came in toward sunset, reporting entire want of success, and not a clew to be found of how the escape had been made, people were in a quandary.

Mounting his horse, Aubrey Moore had then started for River Glade, arriving there just as the judge and his daughter were sitting down to supper.

He was warmly welcomed, and of course saw that they had heard the news, for there had been a dozen men, with as many dogs, horses and guns there in search of the prisoner.

"I told Brent Hastings, who said he wished to reach my house, that I would kill the man who crossed the threshold upon an errand so dishonorable, and so they thought better of it and made no effort to do so," said the judge, and Yesula laughed lightly.

When they were alone together, the servants having departed, Aubrey Moore said, with a significant glance at Yesula as he spoke:

"Of course, Miss Yesula, you had a hand in this bold escape, for I think I can see a woman's work in it, and I congratulate you upon your great success, and Heaven grant he is beyond all chance of recapture."

For a moment Yesula was about to betray all; but then she remembered that her father and Aubrey Moore might be called up in the matter, and so said:

"I thank you, Mr. Moore, for your kind opinion that a woman can do so much, but I disclaim all credit, and suppose, as it will be proven, that the jailer loved gold more than honor and failed in his duty; but I am glad that he did so."

"Ah! now I remember Dudley told me that he had taken from home before leaving a large sum and hid it away in his clothing."

"I am sincerely glad of this, for now he will not be destitute, unless the greedy jailer got it all; but have you any idea where he will go, Mr. Moore?"

"None, for he has kept his secret most closely from me; but then, I have been absent the past three days in Washington, and he may have had the chance and acted quickly; but he will doubtless communicate with me in some way."

"I feel that you went to Washington, Mr. Moore, to endeavor to get a pardon for poor Dudley."

"You are a good mind-reader, Miss Yesula; but I must be on my way, and to-morrow will see you again, while the moment I receive word from Dudley you shall be informed, I assure you," and Aubrey Moore took his departure for The Retreat.

The escape of Dudley Delmont spread like wildfire through the country, and there were many who rejoiced that he had done so.

But the blame fell upon the broad shoulders of Jailer Grasp, and after the first suspicion that Aubrey Moore was at the bottom of it, people came to the conclusion that he was innocent.

If any one suspected that Yesula had a hand in it, they kept their thoughts to themselves, and even Aubrey Moore and the judge came to the conclusion that she knew nothing about it, while she wisely held her peace.

Thus the days passed away until one, two and three months had gone by and no word came from the prisoner.

At last the clipper ship returned, Yesula seeing it pass up the river one day, as she was seated upon the bank, and at once she determined to go up to Washington and learn from the captain all that he could tell her of Dudley Delmont.

She begged her father to accompany her upon

a shopping tour, and the day after her arrival took a carriage and drove alone to the wharf where the ship lay.

The captain received her politely and told her that Mr. Jeffrey, for so Mrs. Jeffrey had registered Dudley's name, and his valet had landed at Panama and there he had lost sight of them.

"Has he deserted me?"

"Has he given me up?"

"No! no! he would not do that, and if I do not soon hear from him, I will believe those Red Diamonds have proved fatal to him."

"Ah! I know what I shall do!"

"I shall go to visit Clarice Jeffrey, for to her a letter will first come, and I know papa will let me go, while she wrote me a few days ago begging me to come."

"To see Clarice, then, I shall go," and so saying she returned to the hotel, and her father was reluctantly persuaded to carry her on to New York and leave her, for without her bright presence River Glade had little sunshine in it for the judge.

But he yielded and soon after he left Yesula at Highland Manor, the Jeffreys' country-seat on the Hudson, while he returned to his home to count the days until his daughter's return.

## CHAPTER L.

### A MASTER FOR ECHOLANDS.

It was certainly a pleasure to Yesula to get away from her home for a while, and where she could have the devoted sympathy of her friend, Mrs. Jeffrey.

The two had been schoolmates and chums, though Mrs. Jeffrey was two years the senior of Yesula.

Still they had shared the same room at boarding-school for three years, and their vacations had been alternately spent with each other.

Mrs. Jeffrey had married an army officer whose wounds had given him an unlimited furlough, and as both had been well off they lived in luxury at their elegant home on the Hudson River.

Major Jeffrey regarded Yesula as he would a sister, and she was ever welcome in his princely home.

He had heard from his wife the whole story of her love for Dudley Delmont, and he gave to her his deepest sympathy, and, knowing how the young captain had been regarded in the army, felt assured that he was not guilty of the charge against him, while he had upheld him in his having released Dick Darke, the renegade, and severely criticised the court-martial which had imposed so severe and unjust a punishment upon him.

For several weeks had Yesula been a guest of the Jeffreys, when she received a bulky letter which she knew to be from her father.

The judge was a poor correspondent and seldom wrote save to send her a remittance, and then his letters ran very much after this concise style:

"MY DEAR CHILD:—

"We are all well at River Glade, and no news among the neighbors, so there is no need of writing you, except to send the written draft upon my bankers, and express the hope that you are enjoying yourself and will come home when you wish to see your old FATHER."

But the present letter was a different kind of affair and Yesula was amazed, for never had her father written her over half a page.

She hastily broke the seal and read it aloud to Clarice Jeffrey as the two sat in the pretty reception-room together.

It was as follows:

"MY DARLING YESULA:—

"This is an occasion when I have something to write about, and so my letter will be a long one."

"I have to tell you that the past three weeks I have been very busy, and the reason is that Echolands has found a master."

"It was in this way: I was seated upon the piazza one afternoon, wondering how much longer you intended to keep this old home like a graveyard by remaining away, when I received a letter from New York."

"It was from a law firm there and inclosed a check for a large sum, instructing me to go over to Echolands, open the old rookery, and that a force of workmen were to be at once put upon the place."

"One was to report to me to order what furniture I deemed necessary, without regard to cost, for the whole house, and all of that which was there and not considered good enough was to be given away to poor families."

"I was to order carriages and horses for the stables, and purchase a hundred slaves to be put to work upon the place."

"The quarters were to be rebuilt in the best style, the parks cleared, roads put in perfect order and in fact not a thing left undone that could add to the beauty and comfort of the establishment."

"I was also to purchase teams for the plantation, and have the wagons meet the boats on their down-trip for freight that was to be sent for Echolands."

"I fairly grew dizzy with the work ahead of me, and it was some time before I could read on and discover that their to Echolands had determined to come and make his home there."

"He had amassed a large fortune it was said, elsewhere, was a bachelor and a man along in years; but he was fond of a life of luxury and intended to live it."

"I at once set to work and going to Richmond brought up a number of families of blacks, all of them good people."

"I had carpenters set to work on the quarters, and there arrived half a hundred skilled workmen for the mansion.

"There were carpenters, masons, plasterers, and paper-hangers, and then came landscape gardeners and the Lord only knows what.

"I tell you, my child, with the negroes working on the fields, I had three hundred hands at work on the estate. It was grand, and I enjoyed it.

"If I needed money I only had to draw for it and the man who came to furnish the house took his plans and went away, to at once send a boat-load of furniture.

"I wrote to the New York attorneys to ask if this heir to Echolands was a Monte Cristo, or the ghost of old Croesus, and they told me that he was a man of vast wealth who had given orders for work to be done with no limit to the price.

"So to-day Echolands looks like a king's abode, and the grounds are being made most beautiful.

"The old gateway was torn down and a massive one rebuilt, with a porter's lodge adjoining, and they say that this new master of Echolands intends to be most exclusive.

"He has ordered the whole estate walled in, so I put a force of five hundred hired negroes on that work yesterday.

"Of course as his agent here I will meet him, and that will mean that you will, and if he can resist falling in love with you then I will be doubly mistaken.

"But, here they are after me with a dozen questions as to what is to be done next, and I must stop writing.

"In about two weeks Echolands will be in all its glory, so come home in time to see it from gate to rear wall, attic to cellar before the grand mogul arrives.

"My love to Kate and her husband.

"Not a word has been heard from poor Delmont, and with his absence and yours, Aubrey Moore looks as blue as indigo.

"I send you a check within for shopping; but don't buy diamonds, for I am afraid of them, and old as I am, will be fool enough to attribute Delmont's ill fortune to those accursed ill-omened gems he owns, and which you said you had returned to him.

"In two weeks, remember, come home, and bring Clarice and the major with you and I'll show you a palace in old Virginia. Your loving

"FATHER."

Such was the letter of Judge Yancey, and naturally it excited the curiosity of Yesula and Mrs. Jeffrey to know who this princely owner of Echolands could be and what he was like.

"I will go as father wishes, Clarice, and you and the major must return with me."

"I will be glad to do so, Yesula; but do you know those Red Diamonds haunt me, as they do your father?"

"And they do me now.

"Oh, that I had not given them to Dudley Delmont?"

And Yesula buried her face in her hands as the memory of the victims who had owned the fatal jewels flashed across her mind.

## CHAPTER LI.

### STRIKING IT RICH.

WHEN the clipper ship, which had borne Dudley Delmont a fugitive from his native land, arrived at Panama, as the captain had told Yesula, he and Grasp had at once left the vessel.

The jailer had acted in the capacity of servant to Dudley, for he did not look like a man with whom the young planter would be traveling as an equal, and he did not wish to cause any one to entertain the least suspicion against him.

Grasp was in truth far more nervous than was Dudley Delmont, and seemed to feel that any one who regarded him closely considered him a fugitive from justice.

Crossing to the Pacific shore the steamer was taken to San Francisco, and once in that city Dudley Delmont determined to part company with the ex-jailer.

He did not like the man, for he was an acknowledged thief, and besides was coarse and uncompanionable.

So he gave him a few hundreds of dollars from the money he had fortunately brought with him the night he left The Retreat, and which was a considerable sum, and advised him to go into some honest business with what he had.

Once on the Pacific Slope, Grasp lost all fear of being captured and at once took Delmont's advice, and thus the two parted; but I may as well remark here that no one would recognize in a certain millionaire merchant Grasp, the jailer, who under an assumed name has made a fortune, and at the same time is honored among his fellow-men.

Leaving San Francisco, Dudley Delmont wended his way eastward, and in good time arrived at a certain town on the Overland Trail.

Here he purchased a good horse and outfit, and started off alone one morning, as though he knew just what point he had in view.

It was the evening of the second day when he rode into a wild mountain country.

But he seemed familiar with the locality, though now and then apparently at a loss just which course to pursue.

At length he appeared to be decided and rode

steadily on, further and further into the wild country.

After picking his way among canyons and hills, he at last came out upon a ridge where before him stood a small cabin.

But upon it rested an air of desertion and desolation, and Dudley Delmont's face clouded.

"He is not here, nor has any one been here for a long time.

"Oh, what memories of this spot come over me!

"How long I lay in that rude hut and suffered agony untold.

"Then it was bodily pain, and now what I feel is mental suffering.

"Well, I will go to the canyon and see if he believed what I told him and went there."

He turned his tired horse away as he spoke and rode back down the ridge.

Reaching a valley he turned into it and then rode up a narrow canyon.

He had gone but a quarter of a mile when he saw a smoke curling up before him.

He got his rifle ready and prepared to meet a foe, for he was in the Indian country, and though there was a patched-up peace between the red-skins and pale-faces, he knew that it was a very dangerous thing for a white man to venture there alone.

As he rode on and turned a bend he came to the head of the canyon, not thirty paces from him.

And there stood, upon a rocky shelf, up out of the reach of waters, which in the rainy season filled the canyon, a small cabin.

A spring trickled down the rocks at the back of it, forming a small rivulet, and the spot was one of intense seclusion.

In front of the cabin, cooking his supper over a small fire, was a man.

His dress was half-Indian, half-miner, and his beard and hair were long and unkempt.

But at a glance Dudley Delmont recognized him.

The frying of the meat in the pan and crackling of the fire had prevented the man from hearing the approach of Dudley Delmont.

But he fairly sprung into the air when he heard the words:

"Ho! Dick Darke, how are you?"

The man dropped the frying-pan, leaped into the cabin-door and a rifle-muzzle ran out, and a shot flew past the head of Dudley Delmont.

Instantly Dudley raised his hands and called out:

"Ho! Darke, I am Captain Delmont."

"No, you are not, for I know him well," came the response.

"Yes, I am, for I have shaved off my beard and cut my hair close."

"When did we last meet?"

"When I released you from the Vigilantes and bade you come here."

"Who is with you, captain?"

"I am alone."

"Honest?"

"I would not lie to you, Darke."

"I believe you, sir," and the man came out of the cabin, while Dudley Delmont rode forward to the slope on which the hut was situated.

"I'm glad to see you, Darke, and to find that you are not at the Indian village."

"I took your advice, sir, and came here, once I saw that you had told me the truth."

"And you are no longer with the Indians?"

"I go to the village now and then, but let them believe I have turned medicine-man and am studying the medicinal qualities of roots and herbs to go back to them some day."

"Well, what luck?"

"Luck?"

"Yes, in the mine."

"Captain Delmont, for you are Captain Delmont, I guess, though I'd never recognize you as you now appear."

"Yes, I am Dudley Delmont, but no longer a captain."

"What, sir, have you left the army?"

"Yes, I was dismissed for releasing you, instead of taking you on to the fort and hanging you."

"Oh! but I am sorry, sir."

"No need of being so, for I do not care, and my conscience upheld me in what I did."

"It is kind of you to say so, sir."

"Now tell me of your luck?"

"Captain Delmont, for so I will still call you, I have struck it rich."

"What do you call rich, Darke?"

"Well, sir, you sent me here, and so we are pards in the mine, and I've got a fortune for us both, while, if I dared work it with others, we would become millionaires, for the gold is here."

"Well, Darke, just now, like yourself, I am under a cloud, and I will tell you of it; but I have an army friend whom I can trust with my life, and I will write him, appoint a meeting, and have him take this mine in his name, with us for the company, as silent partners, and he can work it for us for all it is worth. What do you say?"

"Just what you do, sir, and more, I wish to go away from here and lead an honest life. I have been a bad man, Captain Delmont; but my heart was touched when I met you, and

your kindness to me, when you should have hanged me, made me a different man, and I vowed to live a different life.

"Here I have been since we parted, working hard, and, as I said, I have a fortune for us both, and my share I intend to turn to good use, to try and atone for the past.

"Then, if your friend gets what I believe he will, out of this mine, we will have twenty times the wealth which I have gotten out of it, for though there are pockets here in the canyon, up yonder in the hills there are rich veins of ore.

"Now, sir, take my hand and let us be friends, and you must feel that I mean all that I say, and when you hear the story of my life, as I will tell it you some day, you will understand how I came to be what I am."

The man spoke earnestly, and Dudley Delmont felt that he was honest in all that he said, and so warmly grasped his hand.

Then Dick Darke led the horse of Dudley Delmont back into the hills where he kept his, and the two sat down to the miner's frugal supper and to talk over the past and build up plans for the future.

## CHAPTER LII.

### MOST MYSTERIOUS.

THE new master of Echolands had arrived in Virginia, and he had snubbed every one in the country, so that he was by no means a popular person.

Before his coming Yesula had returned to River Glade, and Major Jeffrey and his wife had accompanied her.

The judge was in ecstasies over their coming, and had Echolands and its master "on the brain," so to speak.

He appointed the next day to drive over to the place, and show it off, and until bedtime he talked to them about the grandeur of the home until Yesula said:

"I am sure, father, we will be disappointed, after your very gorgeous description."

"We shall see," said the judge, with supreme confidence, and they presently parted for the night.

But the next day the Yancey carriage drove over to Echolands.

It was a lovely spring day, and the air was balmy and laden with the sweet scent of flowers.

As they drove up to the grand gateway, a cry of delight from the ladies proved that the first view was not disappointing.

A porter was already there, a huge negro in a fine livery, and he saluted the judge politely and permitted the carriage to roll through and up the beautiful driveway to the mansion.

One glance at the mansion was sufficient to show Yesula that her father had not exaggerated.

She had often ridden by the grand old mansion when it was in its gloomy solitude, and had always admired it.

But now she saw what great changes had taken place. There were large piazzas added, bay windows without number, balconies, turrets and towers, and the structure looked like some grand old castle among the hills of England.

About it were velvety lawns, flower-gardens, parks, and statuary and fountains here and there dotted the scene.

Within all was on the same grand scale as without. Rich carpets were soft beneath their tread, rare paintings and prints hung on the walls, and heavy silk and velvet portieres were over the massive doors.

The furniture was elegant beyond compare, and as they went into the dining-room and saw the array of massive silver they thought indeed that the new master of Echolands must be a Monte Cristo.

There were a score of bedrooms, a breakfast-room, smoking-room, library and extensive parlors, with innumerable little nooks and corners, all prettily furnished.

"I sent him a plan of the house, and he sent back just what changes he wished made in the architecture," explained the judge.

The house already had its servants, well-trained negroes in livery, and all was in readiness for the master's coming.

Then they went to the stables, to find a tally-ho coach, carriages, buggies, drags and horses for all, with saddle animals that were invaluable.

The negro-quarters looked like a flourishing little village, and a pretty chapel was being erected upon the lands at a lovely point, visible from the mansion.

Having viewed the entire mansion and estate, and said candidly that the praise of the judge had not done it justice, the major and ladies returned, leaving Judge Yancey to overlook the finishing touches so as to be ready for the owner should he come unwarned.

That evening when the judge returned home Aubrey Moore was there, and all were startled by the words:

"He has come!"

"What, Dudley?" cried Aubrey Moore, springing to his feet.  
 "Dudley!" said Yesula, almost fainting.  
 "No! the master of Echolands."  
 "Ah!"  
 It was a general chorus. Then came the queries thick and fast:  
 "What is he like?"  
 "Is he handsome?"  
 "Is he old?"  
 "How old is he?"  
 "One moment, please," cried the judge.  
 "He is not old, though his hair is snow-white."

"He is as handsome as any man I ever saw. He is tall, courtly in manner, stern as an old soldier and dresses in taste. He is a haughty man and has brought several friends with him, driving down from the town."

"He was delighted with his home, and told me to name my price for my services. Then he told me that he had come to live as a recluse and did not care to make acquaintances; but he introduced me to his friends and invited me to dine, and, as he insisted, I did so."

"I shall call upon him, at least," said Aubrey Moore.

And he did within the next few days; but the master of Echolands was not at home, so the liveried servant said, and that was the same remark to all visitors, until he became very unpopular with the neighboring gentry and their families.

Now and then he was seen dashing along the country roads, driving his tally-ho and handling the ribbons like a Rocky Mountain driver, while he had always from two to five friends with him, for visitors from away seemed to be his friends and all he cared for.

The judge rode over twice a week to see him at his request, and always dined at Echolands, and he was the only Virginian who was a guest at Echolands, for the lord and master had never returned a single visit paid him, even by Aubrey Moore and the most distinguished planters surrounding him.

What it meant no one could understand, and it caused him to be voted an ill-bred fellow—a shoddyite!

#### CHAPTER LIII.

"GROUND SLOWLY, BUT THE GRIST EXCEEDING FINE."

WHAT it meant no one could understand: but, suddenly, all the neighbors had received invitations to a grand reception at Echolands.

The invitations were most artistic affairs and were delivered by a servant in livery, mounted upon a handsome horse.

Not a soul of those invited were going to refuse, although they had made most ill-natured remarks about the master of Echolands during the half-year he had been a dweller at his new home.

Major Jeffrey and wife were also invited, and they signified their intention of attending, and so became guests at River Glade several days before, for Yesula and Kate had been asked to be the mistresses of the mansion for the gala night.

At last it came round, and the Yancey carriage drove over with the major and the two ladies, and with Aubrey Moore accompanying them, for the judge had gone early.

A young man, a handsome fellow, and in the uniform of a major of cavalry in the United States Army, received the guests, as his friend, the host, was detained for awhile.

The name of this officer was Major Duke Van Dorn, and he won all by his courtly manners.

As the guests began to arrive, the master of Echolands appeared and was presented by the major.

His hair was snow-white, and yet his face was youthful.

And such a face, with its superb black eyes, and perfection of feature!

He was dressed in an army suit, which set off his splendid form to perfection, and his manners were very elegant and fascinating, though a trifle stern.

As all greeted him, he was pronounced to be a magnificent specimen of manhood, and was readily forgiven for holding himself aloof so long.

The supper was in keeping with the grandeur of the house, and when all had feasted, the host arose and every eye was upon him, for they saw that he meant to speak.

His voice was musical, and yet firm, and every word he uttered was heard by the furthest person from him.

What he said was as follows.

"My friends, I greet you, and drink your very good health and welcome to Echolands."

"There is a saying that 'The mills of the gods grind slowly; but the grist is exceeding fine,' and I will leave you to apply it to what you hear to-night."

"Years ago an adventurer sought this part of the country, to hide from justice, for crimes committed elsewhere. He got the good-will of an old planter and became his secretary, and

his ambition led him to continue his crimes, for he determined to get rid of the heir of his benefactor, and thus have all the wealth left to the daughter, whom he secretly married.

"He went, as a pretended Jew peddler, to the frontier, and paid a soldier well to kill this heir, but the soldier made a mistake, and shot his own brother instead!

"He secretly married the young lady, who had been left heiress by her father, who believed his son dead, and, pretending friendship, plotted evil.

"He attempted to assassinate the soldier when he came home, and with two hirelings, Brent Hastings and Reuben Rolland made charges against Judge Yancey.

"He was married in the chapel across the river to the maiden whom he had sworn to secure, for her property, and he had so well laid his plans that she was supposed to be drowned on her way back; but he shot the coachman and ferryman, Black Ben, and thought she would drown, and yet she did not, for a man on the vessel that ran the ferry-boat down seized the unfortunate young bride and drew her on board.

"He returned to tell his story, not knowing that his wife lived to testify against him, and though the vessel carried her to a foreign port, she was glad to go, knowing his perfidy, for he had her under his baleful influence.

"Again he sought to get rid of this soldier heir, and went to Washington to get the court-martial that tried him for an offense to punish him most severely.

"He then plotted to get rid of him, and at the amateur theatricals which you all remember were held at The Retreat, he loaded the pistol of his pretended friend with a bullet, thus getting rid of a tool who was dangerous, and having an innocent man arrested for murder.

"Though appearing a friend he was a foe, and the man I refer to is Aubrey Moore, whom the detectives now have in irons outside, along with his ally in crime, Brent Hastings.

"The man whom he so nearly had hanged escaped, through the aid of Miss Yesula Yancey, and went West, where he had discovered a mine. That mine panned out enormous wealth, and, with one other, who has now gone to a foreign land to dwell, he made this gentleman, Major Duke Van Dorn, a partner.

"Major Van Dorn has worked the mine until it has made its owners millionaires, and the one who discovered it came here, brought detectives with him and has worked up this case against Aubrey Moore, has found his sister, who is here to-night, to testify against the perfidious wretch who almost wrecked her life, and has Judge Yancey who has known him since he came to Echolands, to vouch that its owner is none other than Dudley Delmont!"

#### CHAPTER LIV.

##### CONCLUSION.

THE scene that followed the announcement of the master of Echolands, that he was none other than Dudley Delmont, was a wild one; but when he removed the gray wig that he wore, and all gazed at his face, they immediately recognized him!

There was too much proof at hand for any one to doubt, and when Beatrice, long believed to be dead, entered the room, looking as beautiful as ever, no one could do other than believe.

Had any still doubted when Aubrey Moore, white-faced but calm, came in, his words would have shown all that Dudley Delmont said to be truth, for he said:

"I played a big game for a big stake, and I lost, so let me suffer as I deserve."

Brent Hastings also admitted his guilt, and that he had been hid away by Aubrey Moore, who promised him vast sums if success crowned his perfidious deeds.

So no one could doubt, and while Aubrey Moore was taken North, to hang for a murder committed there, Brent Hastings was sent to prison for a long term of years.

As for beautiful Beatrice, she ultimately became the wife of Major Van Dorn, to whom Dudley had given The Retreat, on the very day that Yesula became mistress of Echolands, which Delmont had bought from Dick Darke, who was the missing heir, but whose misdeeds caused him to become a wanderer in foreign lands, in spite of his sincere sorrow for his evil past life.

And the Red Diamonds?

Well, Dudley Delmont did not sell them, but, casting superstition to the four winds, gave the fateful necklace again to Yesula, who has never known sorrow from its possession.

In fact, she says that the Red Diamonds, a Haunted Heirloom though they may be, shall go down to future generations of Delmonts, who shall all know their strange history, as handed down from father to son.

THE END.

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